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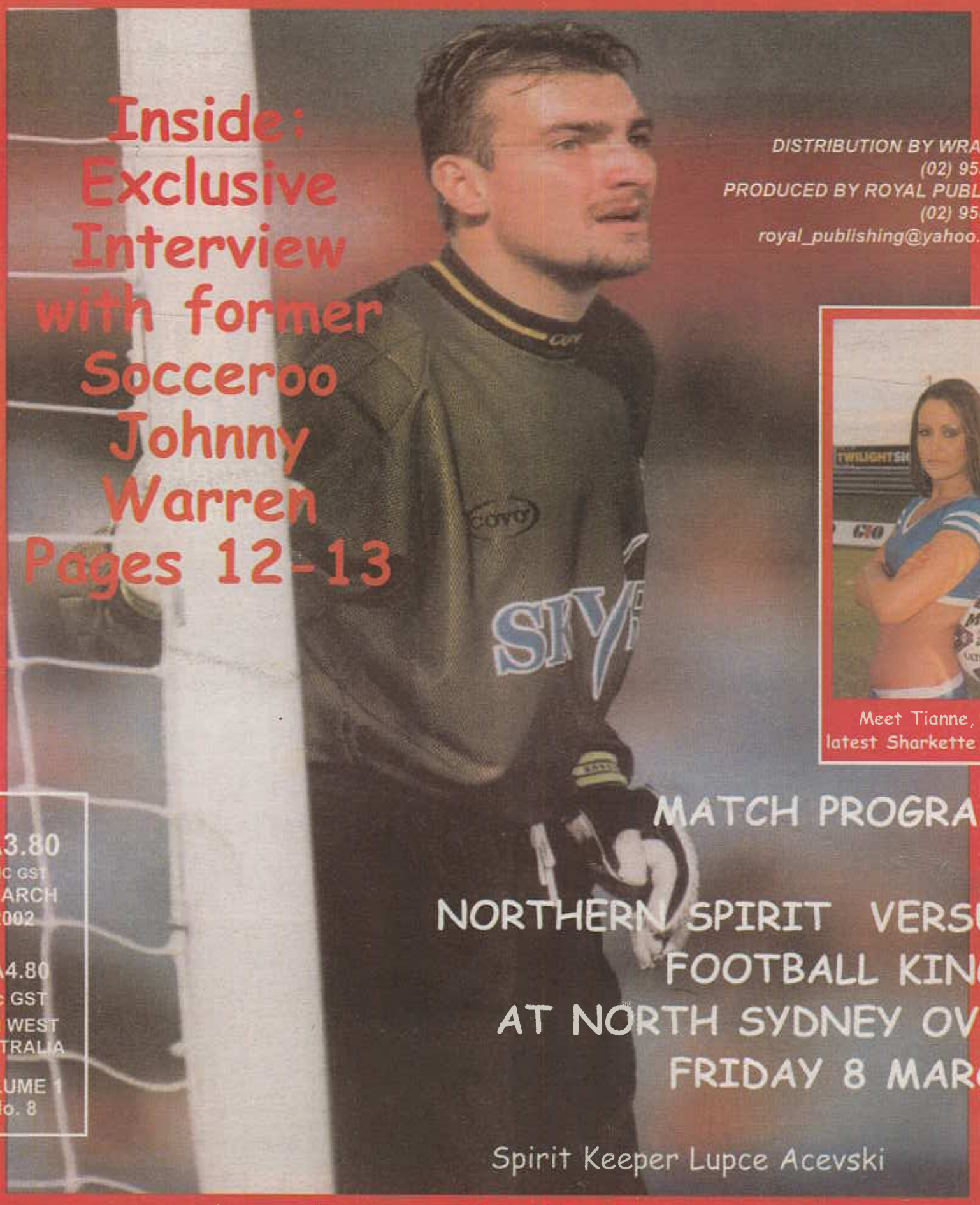

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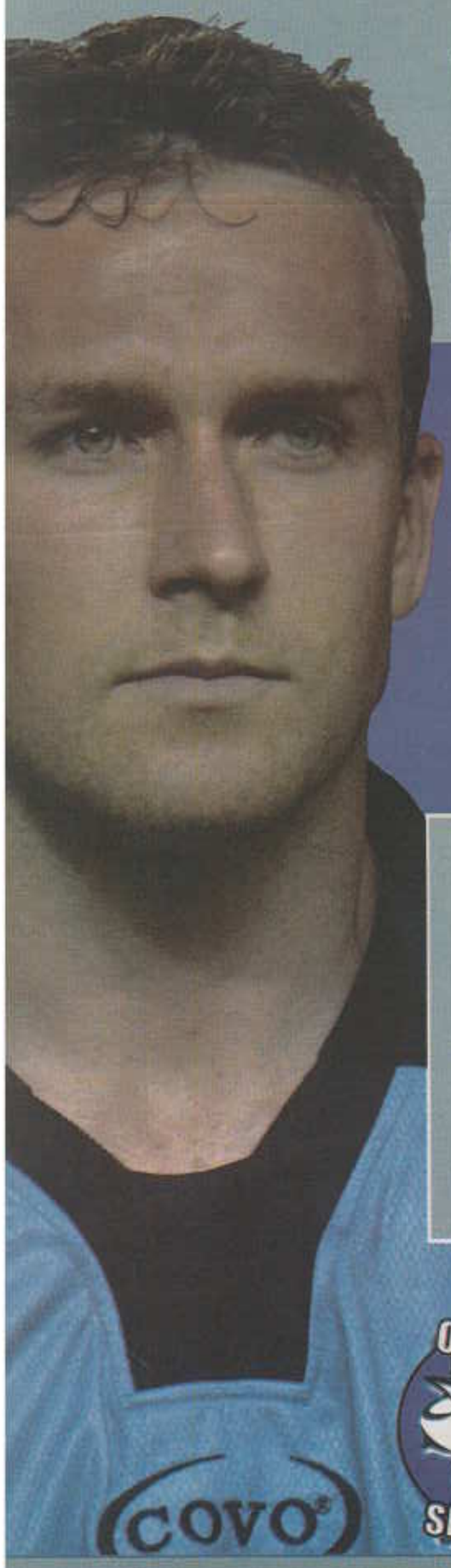

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Unbeaten Sapphires gunning for WNSL title at Parramatta

By Derek Royal and Adam Leto

YEARS ago, if there was one thing that former Central Coast Coasties mentor Allan Bourke couldn't imagine himself doing, it was coaching women's football.

But on Saturday afternoon, Bourke will lead the gun New South Wales Sapphires Women's National League team into their Grand Final showdown against Canberra Eclipse at Parramatta Stadium.

"Five or six years ago coaching a women's team was not something I wanted to do," Bourke told *Soccer Today*.

"But since I became involved with the Sapphires last season, I've grown to admire the girls' skills and their commitment to the game.

"They have just as much technical ability as the boys only they don't have the same strength."

Bourke's coaching CV includes an impeccable Super League grounding since 1980 and a brief stint during the mid-1990s as assistant coach at National League club Parramatta Eagles.

Bourke was then the right-hand man to one of the country's most revered coaches, Rale Rasic, who in 1974 led Australia to the World Cup Finals in West Germany.

And while Bourke thrived on the experience of being involved with the game at the highest domestic level, he and Rasic copped the bullet before the end of the season.

"Despite being sacked, working with Rale Rasic was sensational," Bourke said.

"His experience and wealth of football knowledge was incredible.

"While Rale is not everyone's cup of tea, I certainly learnt a lot from the experience of working alongside him."

Women's football, says Bourke, is the fastest growing sport in Australia and while it's still on the raw side, things are improving.

"It's a developing sport that will takes years before reaching its full potential," he said.

Bourke believes that in the next four or five years a new chapter will begin in Australian women's football.

He sees the talent coming through the system in his role as Head of Coaching at the New South Wales Institute of Sport, and he's impressed with the girls' skills and strength of character.

Some of the kids he's dealing with are just 15 and 16-year-olds, yet they're considered good enough to perform at the elite National League level.

"Girls basically mature earlier than boys," Bourke said.

"I've found that the young ones I look after at the state institute are mentally prepared to cope with the demands of the National League."

After losing last year's title to arch-rivals Queensland Bourke says that he wants to take his team one step further this time around.

And with a galaxy of Matildas and Under 19 internationals in their ranks, the Sapphires may just fulfil that ambition.

After all, given their consistency and unbeaten record, it's no surprise to see the Sapphires in the season finale.

On Saturday they will be looking at finishing the season in perfect style.

On paper at least they field a team of all-stars capable of turning on the magic at will.

They also have the competition's two leading scorers in former

Sapphires ace Kelly Golebiowski

Westfields duo of Alicia Cavanagh and Kelly Golebiowski.

Cavanagh's form in front of goal this season has come as little surprise and she will no doubt be looking to translate that form onto the international stage in the near future.

The Sapphires not only have a good crop of youngsters in Cavanagh, Golebiowski and young Matilda Catherine Cannuli but they also have plenty of experience.

"This year we've had a good mix of experienced and young players," Golebiowski told *Soccer Today*. "It was good to get Queensland out of the way early and get them back for last year, but we're all really pumped for the final. We're confident, but the more experienced girls are keeping all the younger ones in order to make sure everything goes well."

Captain Annisa Tann-Darby is the most capped Australian player of all time, and combined with the likes of Lisa Gilbert and Lisa Warrener at the back the NSW side have few weaknesses.

Their re-match against the Eclipse comes after their epic battle last time round when future star Cannuli came on as a sub and scored two late goals to give the Sapphires the win.

"The Eclipse don't really have the individual brilliance of a lot of players like we do," Golebiowski says. "They're a very good team and their strengths are that they play well together as a team, not as a group of individuals. "It was close last time we played, so it should be another close match this time."

Boutsianis set to play 250th NSL game

AUSTRALIA and South Melbourne striker Con Boutsianis is set to make his 250th NSL appearance when his team takes on Adelaide City Force at Hindmarsh Stadium on Friday.

Thirty year-old Boutsianis commenced his NSL Career at South Melbourne in season 1989. He has played for the club in almost every season since, apart from stints with Collingwood (1996/97 season - 20 games) and Perth Glory (1998/99 to 1999/00 - 49 games).

PERTH GLORY may create NSL history this weekend by wrapping up the NSL premiership with four rounds remaining. The previous record for securing first place in the regular season on the final table was with three rounds remaining.

After Round 21, the Glory lead the table with 46 points (from 19 matches), Newcastle United are second with 34 points (20 matches), followed by Olympic Sharks and Brisbane Strikers both on 33 points (19 matches each).

This weekend the Glory visit Parramatta Power, Newcastle play Marconi and Olympic are up against the Strikers. If neither of Newcastle, Olympic or Brisbane reduces their current points gap on the Glory this weekend, Perth will secure the NSL minor premiership. Or if Newcastle win and Perth draw, but Olympic and Brisbane also draw, then Perth will also wrap up the premiership. Any other scenario this weekend means the premiership won't be sorted out for at least another week.

On two previous occasions the NSL premiership was won with three rounds remaining. In 1979 Marconi secured the premiership after the completion of Round 23 of a 26 round season. And in 1987 Leichhardt also wrapped up first spot after Round 23 of that 26 round season.

In other matches this weekend, Melbourne

Knights host Sydney United in the Croatian derby, Adelaide City host South Melbourne and the Football Kingz visit Northern Spirit.

Lucas Neill escapes suspension

AUSTRALIA international and Blackburn Rovers defender Lucas Neill has been cleared of a professional foul, allowing him to star in last week's one-all Premier League draw against Bolton Wanderers.

Neill was recently sent off towards the end of Blackburn's FA Cup fifth round loss to Middlesbrough after what looked like a harmless collision with opponent Robbie Stockdale.

Referee Graham Barber ruled Neill had held Stockdale back and gave him a red card, which should have led to an automatic one-week suspension.

But Football Association officials last week decided not to ban Neill after watching the tape of the incident.

"Following a review by the match officials of the incident that saw Lucas Neill sent off in Blackburn's recent FA Cup tie against Middlesbrough, it has been decided that the one match suspension will not be imposed," the FA said in a statement on its website.

"The suspension would have begun this weekend but the player is now eligible for selection."

Blackburn Rovers manager Graeme Souness made an official complaint to the FA about Barber and had to be restrained by a police officer and stewards after the final whistle.

Souness still faces an FA misconduct charge as a result of his response to the referee's decision.

Meanwhile, Souness was a frustrated man despite seeing his side's excellent fight back for a point against Bolton at the Reebok Stadium on Sunday.

Souness was frustrated with Andy Cole getting sent off for retaliating after Mike Whitlow had taken him down from behind, he was frustrated with the way Bolton took the lead, and he was frustrated that Rovers couldn't manage to grab the winner that their second half performance deserved.

"I'm delighted for the way we fought back" said Souness, "but it was a frustrating afternoon."

"The manner we lost our goal was frustrating, it was an absolute cock-up by Henning Berg, but he was big enough to admit that and responded in the correct way in the second half."

AAP

Portsmouth chase Foxe

PORTSMOUTH Football Director Harry Redknapp is ready to return to West Ham for Aussie centre-half, Hayden Foxe.

Redknapp, who brought Foxe to Upton Park from Sanfrecce Hiroshima while Irons manager, wants the Australia international on loan for the rest of the season with the view of a permanent move in the summer.

Foxe's time at the Hammers has been blighted by injury - though when he has managed to make the first team has proven his ability at Premiership level.

Meanwhile, Portsmouth chairman Milan Mandaric has backed down and decided to pay his players after threatening to withhold their pay.

Mandaric had a change of heart after meeting with his team, upset that the players had picked up only 11 of a possible 45 points since the start of December.

"The precise situation is that the check to the bank that pays the wages is being released later this afternoon," club spokesman Peter Jeffs said. "Contrary to any other reports it's the club's money and it's being paid as it would have been ordinarily. "The meeting between Milan and the players has been concluded and as far as we're concerned - that's the matter closed."

Mandaric has spent more than $US20 million ($A38.8 million) in the last three years on the team.

AP

RALE RASIC: writing exclusively for *SOCCER TODAY*

RALE RASIC remains the only man to have taken Australia to the World Cup Finals. He achieved that in 1974 when his side qualified for the tournament in West Germany. The legacy of that team's success has been something of a poisoned chalice for subsequent Socceroo teams. Rasic's opinion carries weight with followers of the game, especially those who remember with fondness his deeds of 28 years ago. As always, Rale this week offers his own unique insight into the game ...

Soccer Australia Chairman Ian Knop: the national body once ignored NSW's cries for help but now the boot is on the other foot and SA desperately needs amateur support.

MUCH has been said about the levy that is being introduced by Soccer Australia on Amateur associations.

Before I go into that a bit further I'd like to mention the situation the NSW amateurs, NSW Soccer Federation and Soccer Australia were in a few years ago.

Three years ago the NSW Amateur Association and NSW Federation were full on at each other's throats. Embroiled over a battle to control youth football, the two parties became involved in a dirty war, where clubs and associations found themselves in an unsolvable situation.

Soccer Australia were approached to come in and in the interest of the game in this state intervene in the matter and hopefully resolve what was becoming a serious problem.

And what was Soccer Australia's response? Well they didn't want anything to do with it, simply washed their hands of the situation and said that they couldn't get involved.

It was between the two associations to come to an agreement and understanding.

Three years later and the two parties are talking once again, much to the betterment of the game in this country.

Now the shoe is on the other foot, with Soccer Australia going to the amateurs and asking them for their help.

In the last 10 days I have been to big meetings with three of the biggest amateur associations in NSW and have been suitably impressed.

Granville Association who are celebrating 100 years this year surprised me with the level of professionalism and financial viability they possess.

In fact all three associations were strong financially, their meetings immaculately managed, had all their books in order and were confident and professional with the way they approached the game.

One of the questions that I would be asking to Soccer Australia is will this money be paid back? And what if this money is misappropriated again?

If Soccer Australia want to ask these clubs to find a solution to their financial problems then it's only fair that these clubs know where the money is going and how it's being spent.

Nobody likes to read about what Soccer Australia are demanding. This is the basic issue that is upsetting the amateur associations.

They are not being asked they are simply being told what to do. The amateurs have lost a lot of confidence through past dealings with Soccer Australia and the NSW Federation, the damage has been done so it's only natural they are reluctant to become involved.

They are willing to help find a solution and are flexible. My view is that Soccer Australia should be very open with the Amateur associations and let them know up front what they want and how they will achieve it.

Deep down trust is the most important thing and that is what the people at an amateur level are looking for.

LAST week I attended a tournament at Marconi Stadium between Marconi and AC United.

Named the Celestino Foti Perpetual Trophy in memory of the young man who passed away last year.

It was a brilliantly run day held to raise funds for the Community Access Centre in Liverpool.

It was good to see two clubs do something for such a great cause and the day raised over $6000 which was a great effort.

It was an excellent community effort and just goes to show how easily funds can be raised when there is trust and a good cause involved.

A tradition has now been started between these two clubs and with the phenomenal support that was received is sure to be an event that continues for many years to come.

ON a darker note, it must be said that a lot of NSL clubs must be more cautious when it comes to spending their money these days.

It doesn't matter whether your at the top or at the bottom, signing players to large contracts is not always a wise thing.

I spoke to two BIG name NSL players who told me that they would play for half of the money they're on simply out of love for the game, the only proviso would be that clubs got their act together and acted responsibly and chose the best team week in week out.

According to them it has been an absolute nightmare to just sit on the bench every week, when they could be out there playing. With the economy the way it is how can a club afford to spend big money on a player and then leave them on the bench. Don't clubs look at who they employ?

This is not the first time clubs have mismanaged funds with English club Nottingham Forest guilty of doing exactly that after they had won the World Club Champions Trophy.

They signed players to large contracts only to see them not being able to afford them once the club got relegated down the track. Proving that this does happen even to the best of clubs. Clubs no matter what level have to be careful with how they distribute money. Paying large sums of money can prove to be a costly exercise so lets hope that clubs can get their act together.

AUSSIES ABROAD

Allsopp hat-trick gives County hope

AUSTRALIAN Daniel Allsopp scored a hat-trick for beleagured English Second Division side Notts County on the weekend and the competition strugglers are hoping this will be the catalyst for turning things around and surviving relegation.

Allsopp has been one of the shining light's for Notts this season and his 21 goals has at least given them hope in what has been a gloomy season. He broke two-month goal drought midweek, scoring Notts goal in the 1-1 draw with Colchester and then tore the Tranmere Rovers defence apart in the first half, scoring all his three goals by the 39th minute. The four points collected, while still leaving them in second last position, means they are just one win away from moving out of the bottom three.

Tiatto scores as Man City chase promotion

Socceroo Danny Tiatto grabbed a goal Manchester City's 4-2 home win against Coventry. The win keeps City in second position, and with games in hand of leaders Wolverhampton Wanderers, is looking good to return to the Premier League next season. Kevin Muscat's Wolves team continued on its winning way with a comfortable 2-0 win over Gillingham, with the Socceroo defender still at the centre of speculation that he will be parting ways with the club for Glasgow Rangers in Scotland, even if they do manage promotion to the Premier League. Crystal Palace and Birmingham City did not do their promotion chances any good with a 5-2 and 1-0 loss respectively. Socceroo Shaun Murphy played a full game for Palace, while Socceroo Stan Lazaridis came on as a second half substitute.

Unfortunately Socceroo Steve Corica's presence in the Walsall side cannot prevent their slide towards relegation at the present moment, only managing a 1-1 draw with Portsmouth.

Schwarzer only Aussie Premier League winner

In the Premier League, only Socceroo keeper Mark Schwarzer was on a winning side; Middlesbrough beating bottom placed side Leicester City 1-0. Leeds United continue to struggle and were held to a 0-0 draw by Everton, while Lucas Neill was again in the Blackburn Rovers side that grabbed a valuable away point at Bolton. Richard Garcia nces for West Ham and was replaced midway through the second half in the 2-1 loss to Aston Villa.

Dalglish wants to help Australian soccer

By Guy Hand

IN A stellar soccer career, Scottish legend Kenny Dalglish got to see first-hand just how good Australian players can be.

He played with Craig Johnston in the all-conquering Liverpool sides of mid-1980s.

He was manager of Blackburn Rovers' Premier League winning side in 1995, which included Robbie Slater.

And as director of football with Celtic, Dalglish got to know and see up close the talents of Mark Viduka.

Now Dalglish believes he can help Australian soccer players who want to carve out careers overseas.

The former Celtic and Liverpool great is involved with Proactive Sports Group, one of Europe's leading soccer management companies, and was on hand to help it launch its Australian operation here today.

Already Proactive has secured Socceroo Lindsay Wilson a lucrative contract with Dutch giant PSV Eindhoven, has several top young Australian soccer players on its books and wants to sign more.

Dalglish, who is Proactive's director of football operations worldwide, said Johnston, Slater and Viduka all had to carve their own paths to European careers.

"That's where we come in. The three of them didn't have much help in trying to progress their career," Dalglish said.

"The onus was left up to themselves to take it forward.

"If we can help more kids to progress the way those three progressed, then we'll have done our job."

Proactive has offices in nine countries and represents leading world stars such as Blackburn's Andy Cole and Aston Villa's Peter Schmeichel.

Dalglish, won seven English League titles and three European Cups as a player for Liverpool before going on to a glittering career in club management, is on his first visit to Australia.

He said Australia had terrific infrastructure to produce young players, like the national and state institute of sport programs.

But he said with the national league ailing, young players lacked a natural progression within Australia once they finished at the institutes and needed to look overseas to their futures.

"We won't have any conflict of interest with coaches or with Soccer Australia," he said.

"We want to help the young talented Australian footballer to progress as best he possibly can.

"If the young players can progress it's in the best interest of everyone who enjoys football in Australia.

"Because if (FIFA president) Sepp Blatter is true to his word and allows the Oceania group to get automatic qualification to forthcoming World Cups, then you have to have the best possible squad available.

"We're here to help, not to interfere or work against anyone."

Dalglish, whose last football management post was at Newcastle, said he had no wish to return to the day-to-day grind of the game.

"I've got no great desire to go out and prostitute myself to get a job in football," said Dalglish, who turned 51 today.

"It's been a huge part of my life. But then again, I suppose you never know."

FRANCIS AWARITEFE writes Football

Socceroos selection policy remains one of the game's great unsolved mysteries

ONE of the greatest mysteries in the modern game in this country is the Socceroos' selection policy.

With so many talented players running around in the NSL, there surely should be more of an evaluation and review of the performances of some of the exciting stars we have in our competition.

Angelo Costanzo is one example of a player who really has stepped up a level in the past two years, and his development has come from playing in our own backyard, not in some second or third division club in Europe.

He is a very good defender, uses his body well and has a high understanding when it comes to reading the game. On the ball he is the best sweeper in the country, is a good passer of the ball and gets his side going forward from the back.

The only weaknesses I can see are that he isn't the quickest defender and the faster strikers could leave him a bit vulnerable. His temperament is also something he needs to work on, as he has been prone in the past to do some silly things, but having said that there is no doubt that he has what it takes to play at the next level and represent his country.

Brad Maloney is another who is having an outstanding year. After an injury-plagued season last year, this season we have seen the best of "Bugsy". He has settled in well in the Perth midfield and although he isn't scoring as many goals as we're used to seeing, he is playing the best football of his life.

Two other veterans that have performed admirably in an underachieving side this season have been Carl Veart and Aurelio Vidmar.

Both are a credit to themselves and their clubs with the way they have shouldered a depleted Adelaide side this season. When Veart has been fit this season, I haven't seen him play any better, and the leadership role he has undertaken has really brought out the best in him.

ON the topic of inspiring leaders comes the experienced and extremely underrated Steve Panopoulos.

He is the one responsible for getting things done in the heart of South's midfield, and week in week out he always gives 100%.

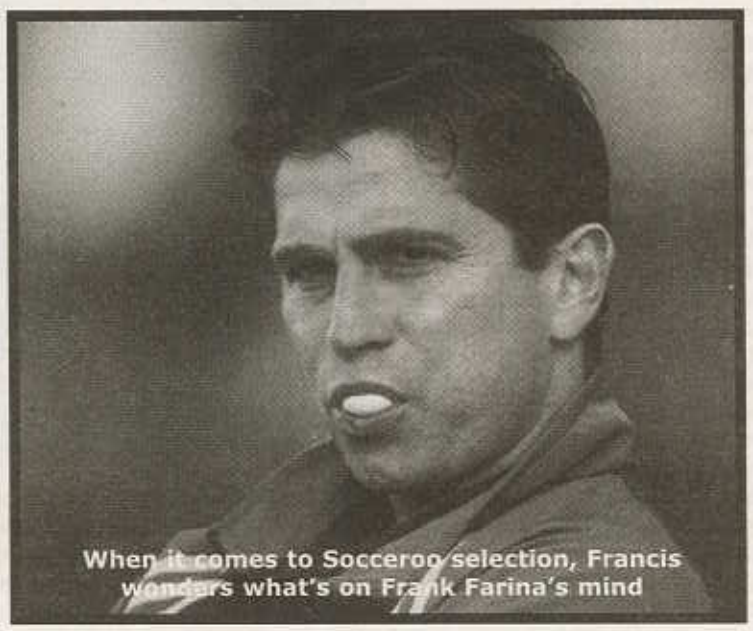
Often the headlines are grabbed by the brilliance of players such as Boutsianis and Trimboli, but Panoppoulos deserves just as much credit as these guys for the work he has put in during the season.

Boutsianis has made a tremendous impact since returning to South Melbourne and it's made even more amazing considering the fact that he spent half of the season on the sidelines.

Collectively speaking, people have talked about how the standard of the NSL is nowhere near the standard it was in past years.

But the fact still remains that we continue to churn out quality players, reflected in the transfer of players such as Nick Carle and Lindsay Wilson from the Olympic Sharks.

There is plenty of other talent on show as well with the likes of John Maisano and Ahmad Elrich showing that they have what it takes to make it at the next level also.



When it comes to Socceroo selection, Francis wonders what's on Frank Farina's mind

If they do want to represent their country at a senior level, their best bet would be to jump on the next plane out of here, because their chances of being selected whilst playing in the NSL are not good.

THERE appears to be a cultural cringe when it comes to selecting home-based players, and Craig Foster and Dominic Longo are two recent examples.

When Longo was playing in Belgium, he was in and out of the first grade team, not what you would call a regular first grader. He was however a regular for the Socceroos. Once he returned to Australia, he was seemingly forgotten for National selection.

It's not like he had changed as a player, as he was still the same, so why wasn't he still part of the National make-up?

Craig Foster is another example. When he was playing regularly for Crystal Palace he was a key member of the National team. Upon his return to the NSL, where his skill or ability hasn't diminished, he like Longo, is no longer included in the plans of the Socceroos.

In my opinion Farina has to give something to the players in the NSL to aspire to. There are players in the NSL who will do justice to the green and gold, so let's hope that worthy players at this level are given an opportunity and that they don't have to play in a second or third-rate competition half-way across the world just to get noticed.

FRANCIS Awaritefe is a former Socceroo and NSL goal-scoring ace.

Pom boss says Australian game needs to be fixed immediately

By Guy Hand

ONE OF the most influential figures in England's Premier League has thrown his weight behind calls for a top-to-bottom overhaul of Australian soccer.

Newcastle United chairman Freddy Shepherd, who has spent the past 18 months considering an investment in Australian soccer, said the game was going nowhere and needed to be fixed immediately.

Shepherd, who has been in Melbourne for the Australian Grand Prix, said Australian soccer needed a similar model to the English Premier League, with Soccer Australia and the national soccer league being run independently.

He also said Australian soccer's broadcast deal with Channel Seven should be scrapped for the good of the game and the Federal Government needed to step in to ensure the game's survival.

"Soccer Australia must be divorced from the league. It's ridiculous the way it's being run now," Shepherd said.

"You've got the typist from Soccer Australia in there typing up the sponsorships for the league. It's so stupid to run a business like that.

"The league needs restructuring, the broadcast deal needs to be scrapped and renegotiated, and the government should get off its backside and do something.

"This is the last chance for Australian soccer to do something about fixing things, because there's only one way it's going to go if they don't and that's even further down."

Shepherd took over Newcastle United when it was on the brink of receivership and turned it into one of the Premier League's powerhouses.

He went to school in Australia and spent part of his childhood at Lake Macquarie in New South Wales, and has made several recent visits to Australia on what he termed "a fact-finding mission".

Shepherd has spoken to several Australian clubs, including his English club's NSL namesake Newcastle, Marconi and now-defunct Carlton about possible investment.

He said he and top European sports marketing firm Proactive were hoping to pitch some ideas about how to improve Australian soccer to those in charge of the game.

Shepherd said if the necessary changes were made, he hoped he could interest a consortium of European clubs to invest long-term in Australian soccer.

Already Glasgow Rangers has a majority shareholding in NSL club Northern Spirit.

But he said Australian soccer - and a restructured NSL - needed to be run by Australians.

"We're not here as a charity to underpin the league, but I certainly would like to encourage other chairmen to come and have a look at what's going on here," he said.

"It would be great if you could get five or six English clubs, Italian and German clubs coming down here and giving a commitment to invest x amount for say five years.

"All I would say about the people in charge down here is that the best people are required for the job.

"At the moment, it's going nowhere. There's a pulse there, but it needs to be revived soon."

Glasgow Rangers has a majority shareholding in Northern Spirit (above)

Glory to visit Malaysia

By John Mason

PERTH Glory will undertake its first overseas trip in early September when it travels to Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo to play two games against the Crocs, Sarawak's state side in the Malaysian National league.

The pre-season trip is being sponsored by Curtin University, which is in the final stages of completing its new campus at Miri in the northern part of the state of Sarawak.

The team will also travel to Miri to play the local side and to conduct coaching clinics at local high schools.

The trip has been organised through Glory sponsors who are keen to maintain the links between Glory and Sarawak established back in the 90s when both assistant coach Alan Vest and striker Alistair Edwards coached and played respectively for the Crocs.

Former Perth Glory player PJ Roberts is presently on a one-year contract with the Crocs and will line up against his former teammates on September 1 and 3 at Sarawak Stadium in Kuching.

"The Glory players and coaching staff are looking forward immensely to the opportunity of visiting Sarawak and to playing the Crocs," said Glory Chief Executive, Jeff Dennis.

"We're particularly delighted that Curtin University has come on board as major sponsor for the trip as it provides them with a great opportunity to present a very strong brand in front of what is their core market.

"Likewise, Glory is pleased to have an association with this very prestigious educational institution and we are looking forward to exploring other areas of mutual interest."

Curtin University's Director of Sport, Associate Professor Lawrence Apps, said his institution was delighted to sponsor Australia's leading Soccer team on a visit to a country that has been so important to Curtin University of Technology.

"Curtin's strong academi links with Malaysia have beer enhanced by the development in Sarawak o our own campus which will b officially opened just after th Glory visit," Professor App said.

"And given the prominenc of soccer in Malaysian culture the university is pleased t play a part in showing off ou talented local players and providing a platform for sim ilar sporting links in th future."

THE WORLD OF WOMEN'S SOCCER

with Matildas star Anissa Tann-Darby

Sapphires seeking another WNSL championship at Canberra's expense

Anissa Tann-Darby has played more international matches for Australia than any other player in women's soccer history. Anissa writes a weekly column for SOCCER TODAY, offering readers a special insight into the women's game. This week: Anissa looks ahead to the Sapphires WNSL Grand Final against Canberra.

THIS year's National League grand final is only a few days away with both the NSW Sapphires and the Canberra Eclipse putting the final touches to their respective preparations.

The game will be held at Parramatta Stadium at 4 pm as a double header with the Parramatta Power versus Perth Glory National League game.

Both teams are eagerly awaiting this year's final, especially with the anticipation of a big crowd and a [illegible]lity venue.

The Canb[illegible] Eclipse have never won a National [illegible]ague title although they have participa[illegible] in a Grand Final, so they will go out with every intention of clinching their first title.

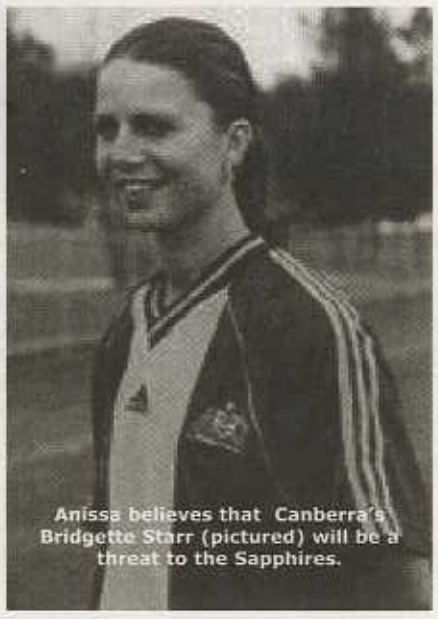
Canberra Eclipse are at their strongest this year with a team full of seasoned internationals as well as new internationals. Bridgette Starr a veteran of the 1999 World Cup and the 2000 Olympics will be marshalling the Eclipse defence and her performance and leadership qualities, may be the difference to an outstanding young team.

Recent Internationals Rhian Davies and Gill Thomson have been causing havoc down the right hand side and it was there penetrating runs in our game against them three weeks ago that caused us numerous problems.

An attacking raid by these two outstanding players cost us the goal in our 2-1 win in round 9. Not only do we have to contend with the raids down the right but with both Brigette and Sacha Wainwright doing the same on the left, I think it will be a busy weekend for our defence.

Sacha Wainwright would have to be one of the most underestimated players in the league. With a lethal left foot and engines to match on her day she is unstoppable. Her penetrating runs down the left hand side, not only for the Canberra Eclipse but also for the Matildas cause defences huge headaches. Sacha is now 30 and he stamina and work rate are outstanding. She has been running riot down the left hand side for the last tens years and the size of her legs are a reflection of this continuous running. Members of the Matil[illegible] believe that she has run all her quads [illegible] off over the years with her continuous [illegible]ning and every time we have testing she always seems to weigh in that little bit lighter.

The Canberra Eclipse has 8 players in the Australian Institute of Sport Scholarship squad, the most of any National league team. Controlling the midfield throughout the year has been new AIS inclusion Tal Karp, who has been on the fringe of the National team for the last couple of years and her dedication and determination have now paid off with her selection. PC Hepperlin has also been re selected in the AIS squad after a year's absence. PC is also a very talented midfielder and also a veteran of the 1999 World cup and the 2000 Olympics. At the ripe old age of 21 PC has a great future in the game and is technically one of Canberra's better players. Another player to watch is Amy Wilson currently recognized as the Matildas stand up Comedian she is always providing great entertainment for our team. This year she has moved into the forward line and has scored a bagful of goals including a hatrick in their [illegible]nd ten fixture against the Northern NSW pride.



Anissa believes that Canberra's Bridgette Starr (pictured) will be a threat to the Sapphires.

Canberra is [illegible]lso strong in defence with Susan Read between the posts, she was also recently selected in the AIS scholarship program and after a couple of years absence from both the state and National scene her inclusion in the AIS squad is a big bonus. Unfortunately she has been troubled by injury lately and was not able to play against us in Round 9. However, this year the Eclipse have great depth in their goalkeeping dept and currently also have the young Matildas goalkeeper. Hopefully, Susan will be fit for the grand final as her experience and organization from the back will greatly enhance the strength of the Eclipse side.

Our team the Sapphires have been working hard over the last couple of weeks in preparation for our grandfianal appearance against the Eclipse. After last years disappointment the girls feel they have unfinished business to attend to. The girls were all very disappointed with their 1-0 loss to Queensland and wish to continue the trend of winning the National league every second year. Coach Allan Bourke gave a number of players this weekend off so that they could rest in anticipation of the final

Allan organized a training session with the boys from Parramatta Power on Thursday night, which was great. I know a number of the girls weren't able to concentrate due to the good-looking attributes of a number of the power boys. I don't think he will be having another session with the boys again but I'm sure our sessions throughout the week will be extremely intense. The team currently has no injury worries and although we lost Neisha Klessattal and Taryn Rockall throughout the season both with knee reconstructions, our squad depth should allow us to compensate for the loss of these two great players.

The Sapphires had only 5 players chosen in the AIS squad and I know a number of girls would like to show that they still believe they should be selected in the side and will be out to prove it on Saturday. Cassandra Kell was recently selected in the AIS team and would have to be one of the inform goalkeepers at the moment. Its good to see just like the men's game that we have such depth when it comes to goalkeepers.Saturday should prove to be a great advertisement once again for the women's game. As a curtain raiser to the all-important Perth game it will be a good opportunity once gain to promote our game.

Trimboli getting back into the groove

By Adam Leto

INSPIRATIONAL South Melbourne leader Paul Trimboli admits that his side still have a way to go before they're capable of being serious title contenders.

Coming off the bottom of the ladder to a position where they are challenging for a finals berth the South side have risen from the hollows to be one of the form sides in the competition.

"Coming last and down the bottom of the table for so long didn't sit well with a lot of the guys," Trimboli told Soccer Today.

"We want to make sure that even if we don't make the finals that we can still put some pressure on the other sides in the competition.

"On our day though we feel we can beat any side, but we've got some difficult trips ahead and I've played in these places with teams that were coming first and still haven't come away with anything so it's going tobe hard.

The core of last season's side that won the Minor Premiership convincingly are back together and throw in the step-up of players such as Kisnorbo and Murdocca and you have one of the most well-balanced lineups in the competition.

"We just want to put ourselves in the position where people start to take us serious again," Trimboli said.

"People have to remember that we've been in three out of the last four grand finals.

"We just wanted to get some of that respect back again.

Since the return of Con Boutsianis to the fold, South is yet to lose a game and Trimboli admits that he has added much more scope to their attack.

"We were pretty competitive at the start of the year and weren't being outplayed that badly," he said.

"Our defence was going fairly well we just had problems scoring goals.

"On his day Con is one of the best half-dozen players in the country and his ability to score and create goals has really helped.

"If you can't score goals then that makes it hard to put pressure on the opposition."

Trimboli too, is starting to hit his straps after three months on the sidelines and his return to form could well see South challenge for their fourth grand final in five years.

"I'm just glad to be playing again," he concedes.

"I just love playing and being out made me realise how important it is to me, after playing for so long you can sometimes take things for granted."

ALAGICH JUST LYING LOW AND GETTING THE JOB DONE

By Adam Leto

BRISBANE defender Richie Alagich celebrated his 150th NSL game against Adelaide City Force last Friday in a typically understated fashion.

Like most of the work the hard-working defender gets through, most of it gets unnoticed by spectators, but it has been more than welcomed by his team-mates this season.

It seems that with just about any achievement, Alagich just takes it all in his stride and it's this easily approachable and knock-about attitude that has seen him become an important part in this Strikers outfit.

"It's not something that's particularly special, it's nice to think that you've played so many games, but it's probably something I should've achieved a couple of years back," Alagich told *Soccer Today*.

The Strikers have surprised a few people this year and many had even predicted that the Brisbane side would finish down the bottom of the ladder this season.

Not getting ahead of themselves yet, the Strikers still realise that they could miss out on the finals if they don't maintain the sort of intensity that they have displayed for most of the season.

"We've got some good players without having any real outstanding players apart from (Fernando) Rech of course," Alagich explains.

"Jason Kearton makes a big difference to the side and has a lot of experience. He adds a lot of stability and gets the team settled which certainly helps."

As for himself Alagich is more than happy to play the role of the quiet enforcer at the back and keep out of the spotlight that his more illustrious team-mates share.

"I prefer to fly low under the radar and I think every team needs someone like that," he says.

"You need to have your outstanding players and you also need those players who will do the job that is required of them.

In his first season at th Strikers since coming across from South Melbourne at the end of last season, Alagich is enjoying his new enviro ment, even if the conditions are a little hotter.

"From my point of viev it was like, all of a sudd here I am in Brisbane," he said. "But it's a grea place, and the only thin is that I can't wait to ge back home to Adelaide put a jumper on again."

CONTINUING OUR BEST READ WEEKLY SERIES ON

SOCCER SKILLS

JOHN CRAWLEY: one of the game's best

By Jimmy Fraser
former Australia World Cup goalkeeper

IN last week's column we talked about not being scared of the opposition you face when competing against other keepers either at club level or representative level.

My opinion is competition is healthy and raises the standard of effort and determination from the competitors as they strive for the coveted No 1 shirt.

Coaching is no different, coaches are constantly under pressure to achieve and are judged on the results they gain and the players they produce.

Again we should not be scared of the competition if no young coaches are coming through then the game will not survive.

The young coaches bring fresh ideas to the game and with the amount of new technology and information available in so many different forms the methods of training are continually being updated.

While older coaches have the experience to pass on the younger coaches are gaining the experience plus developing their new ideas.

The coaches can pool their ideas and learn from each other so everyone is a winner.

One such young coach is John Crawley who sports an impressive sporting and educational C.V. and is already making his mark in the coaching stakes while still playing for Blacktown in the State League.

John ventured off to Chile as a young player and spent six years with Colo Colo, the experience has given a definite South American flavour to his playing and coaching style.

On his return to the Australian scene he had stint with Sydney United in the National League before a bad break in his hand sidelined him.

While out injured he continued his studies at University before signing with Blacktown is the State league where he won the coveted Goalkeeper of the Year award.

John has now graduated as a Bachelor of Applied Science majoring in Psychology, which will aid him in his coaching endeavours.

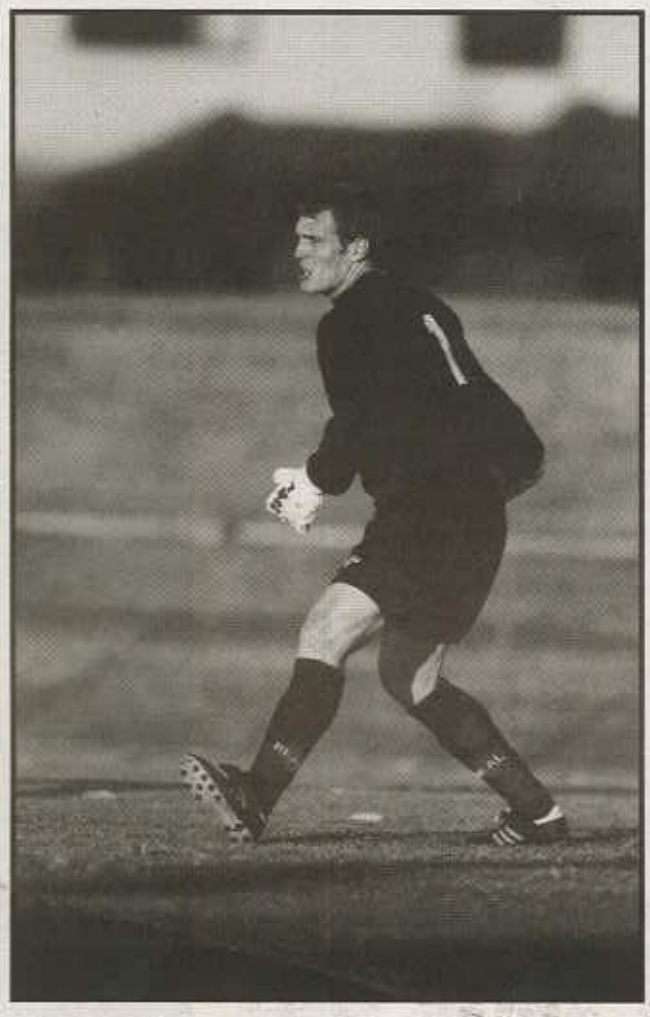
He is taking a rest from studies at the moment but will return to some post-graduate studies in the near future.

John has now branched out into coaching and now runs the COERVER goalkeeping program, which is aimed at the grass roots in young goalkeepers through to thirteen years of age.

Already a qualified COERVER field coach the goalkeeping program now adds new depth to the well-established and highly successful COERVER program, which operates on a worldwide basis.

With impressive height and build John has a natural on field presence that gives his defense confidence and his organisational skills are his biggest asset.

His instructions from the back as he communicates with his defense shut down many attacking options in fact I would say that John as a goalkeeper is the best organiser and communicator that I have coached at any level.



Young goalkeepers looking to improve in this area should take a look at John when he plays with Blacktown.

When talking with John about this article he touched on the friendly attitude that keeper's share and how he enjoyed this camaraderie.

It is true keepers are a different breed and even when playing in a foreign country the goalkeepers may not understand each others language but still share a common bond in their position and the philosophy that goes with it.

Keepers seem to seek each other out and have a special relationship that is understood only by those of us who have shared all the emotions that go with wearing the number one shirt. John is one of a few players making the transformation to the coaching scene and every endeavour must be made to encourage these players to stay in the game and contribute their knowledge and new ideas and further the coaching scheme so it continues to expand and improve in the coming years.

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THE INTERVIEW: JOHNNY WARREN

Former Socceroo Johnny Warren is one of the most respected men in the Australian game. A veteran of 43 internationals between 1965 and 1974, Warren scored six goals for his country. A legend at Sydney club St. George, Warren is today one of the game's leading television analysts. MATT CLEARY caught up with Johnny for a few ales at the Clovelly Hotel ...

ST: Soccer in Australia has come a fair way from the 'wog ball' days of the 70s but it's still probably the fifth or sixth most popular spectator sport. Apart from the interest around World Cup time, the game seems to have stagnated. With its massive junior base and global appeal, how (and when) is the NSL - what some call the sleeping giant - going to take on rugby league's NRL, rugby union's Super 12 and and Australian football's AFL?

JW: It's a hard one for soccer because the NSL is very much under-estimated, the quality of it. People watch the highlights of the Premier League and then watch an NSL game and say that's not as good. But when Viduka was playing in the NSL people didn't want to know about him. Or Kewell with the U/17 national team. Or Brett Emerton, who played the last four years here at club level - he's now one of the hottest properties in Europe. You take the 160 top rugby, cricket, Australian Rules players out of Australia and see where those sports go. The NSL is almost a youth league.

The second part to the answer is does it really matter what 19 million Australians think? Soccer's part of the global, world scene. So I mean if we can sit and watch our players anywhere in the world, does it really matter? I only ever see the National League as a feeder system to overseas. But the way forward - and I've seen it for 40 years - is to become part of an Asian League. Like the European Champions League. They want to see Manchester Utd play Real Madrid or Barcelona, they want Milan playing Bayern Munich. It's the same in this part of the world. It's not going to be Northern Spirit playing Adelaide City, it's going to be two or three Aussie teams in an Asian league. Playing in front of 100,000 in Shanghai, there'd be Asian TV interests in that. It'll be denied, but down the track that's what'll eventually happen. It's a global village type thing.

ST: What are your views on European clubs 'owning' Australian clubs?

JW: The only way NSL clubs are surviving now is they're selling off their best. Every year they have a sell off. You know, Glasgow Rangers own Northern Spirit. It's a cheap investment for them. They drop a couple of mill and they've only got to get one Kewell in 10 years. Parramatta Leagues sold a boy to an Italian club, they sold Mile Sterjovski to Lille, the top team in France. All these guys have run around here but no-one wants to know.

I think there's a real fear of soccer from the other sports, because they can't compete internationally. Soccer's just too big. It's just massive. Some of these blokes are making $185,000 a week as a base salary before sponsorships. You're talking 21-year-old kids. Every little kid you speak too, they say 'I want to play overseas' and 'I want to play for Australia'. But it's not an easy one to solve. I mean Wollongong will die this year but they've sold off four of their players. Took them four years to get a good team playing really good football, champions twice, and then one here, one there, another one there, and they've cut the heart out of the team. And their results this year are very ordinary.

Soccer in Australia will stay at this status quo until they do something like rugby union did by establishing competitions with New Zealand and South Africa via the Super 12 and Tri-Nations series. But to do that they've got to get the co-operation of Asia. You'd have a league, you'd either set it up privately or in cooperation with them - even a Southeast Asian setup, a Super 12. I mean, we took St. George to play in Japan in 1970. We had their teams come here. We were doing it 30 years ago. And now they're still talking about it.

ST: Since you were playing, how has soccer changed for the better?

JW: Oh, heaps. It's more professional. Changes to the laws have encouraged attacking play. Laws to protect the players. Skill and enterprise are being rewarded. The days are gone where you can be negative and dirty and win.

Now you watch the top teams and they're just, well, you watch Real Madrid and they're just a bloody Rolls Royce. And I give FIFA credit; in an age of very rampant commercialism they've been able to keep the fair play. I know there's a lot of pushing and such, but it's a much more entertaining game. The number of games decided in stoppage time is incredible. The old days, you know, with 10 minutes to go it was shut up shop. These days with three points for a win...the old philosophy of 'draw away, win at home and win the championship' doesn't work. Players are also better educated, not just in technique, but in fitness. We'd stuff steak and chips into us three hours before the game, then go and run around. We were brought up that is you didn't have a steak three hours before kick-off, well, then you couldn't play. You weren't allowed to swallow water, you could only rinse your mouth. It was quite primitive when you look back. At half-time it was tea - a carry-over from the English - and oranges. There was no cooling down, no warming up, no stretching - in every respect it's improved.

Formerly one of Australia's most respected players, Johnny Warren is today one of the country's finest television analysts.

ST: How has soccer changed for the worse?

JW: The money. It's obscene. Obscene in a sense that Mum and Dad cart the kids round when they're six, Mum's run the can teen and sell the raffle tickets so the kids can have a game of football. And at the top you've got guys earning $185,000 a week. The gap between the big and the small is just getting too big. I mean how much money do they want? It's ironic that the money in the (English) Premier League came from Rupert Murdoch and he hasn't given a cent to the game here. It's all business. How the local school team hasn't got a soccer ball to kick. Former Wimbledon tennis champion Evonne Cawley - her son [Morgan] plays for Olympic - she's asking them for a hundred soccer balls to take up to Aboriginal communities in the north.

Another thing that disturbs me, and maybe I'm old fashioned, is that the heroes today, as soon as they get two bob more from somewhere else, they're off. For example, if you played with St. George and I'm a St. George fan, and I idolise St. George and you're my idol, in the old days you were there for life. It's the reason I'd support a club, because you're my hero. But the heroes today, soon as they've got two bob more somewhere else, they're off. You know, they're kissing the shirt today, maybe it's Manchester United, next week it's Real Madrid. I think the game is moving away from the traditional fan because they can't afford it. And the Yuppies and the corporates coming in, at a lot of stadiums you're not getting the atmosphere. I went to Highbury and watched Leeds and Arsenel, half the mob are drinking wine and having a yak. And same at Old Trafford. (Manchester United skipper) Roy Keane complained about it last year. It's a danger.

That tribal thing still exists in South America, I mean the stadiums just throb with emotion for the team, there's no suits.

ST: What was it like touring with the Socceroos?

JW: On tour we were put to bed at 10 pm. And they checked we were in bed. We didn't find out until later that a lot of coaches did that so they could go out! There was a lot of discipline before it's time. Not that that was a good thing because it was quite boring. For example before the World Cup the team had played in Hong

St. George captain Johnny Warren accepts the Tokyo Cup.

Kong, had a training camp in Israel, a training camp in Switzerland, played three games against Swiss first division sides, then went into Hamburg for two more games. After the last one the boys were allowed two hours in Hamburg. That's all we had off. The players were spewing about it. There was no social agenda.

Players today wouldn't put up with it. We were on a mission and the discipline was imposed. Those were the days you didn't ask why. If someone said eat a steak three hours before the game you did what you were told.

The players who broke the discipline, there were two players - Iran was in our World Trip in 1970. We played Iran three times in five days. Won two, drew one. It was the start of Rale Rasic's term as national coach.

He was wanting to play his best players every game, and the boys on the bench weren't getting a look in.

We were in Iran and two of the boys broke the curfew.

When they went around to check the rooms they were in bed but they were dressed.

So they've gone down the backstairs, not knowing that the coach, who had also been a player, had bribed all the concierge guys around the hotel.

And he was paying them a months wages for a nights work.

The two guys were found out and were banned from ever playing for Australia again.

So soccer, I mean whether it was the ethnic thing, whether it was the coaches were not Aussie, or that they'd come up in a professional environment - they came and imposed that on the players. And plus, because we narrowly missed qualification in 1970 - we were robbed, but that's a whole other story - 75 per cent of that team carried over into the team that eventually went to West Germany [in 1974].

And they were really pissed off, you know, that we were fucking robbed. And robbed by our own people, because of the travel arrangements and all that shit. So there was a real missionary thing about it.

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FOR THE GOOD OF THE GAME

Seriously, who would want to be a referee?

By Adam Leto

MATCHES at an amateur level are often seen as just a novelty affair.

Two teams out there to have a ball and enjoy themselves.

In most cases however this couldn't be further from the truth as usually it pits two sides hell-bent on destroying the opposition by as many goals as possible.

The skill level may not be there but that doesn't restrain their enthusiasm for victory. Knowing that they have to face the hussle and bussle of nine to five work the next day, this is an opportunity to finally achieve some glory, so the stakes are high.

All this quest for inner satisfaction, does come at a cost though as often these matches can turn quite physical, leaving both sides worse for wear at the end of 90 minutes.

The man in the middle, who's role according to most of these players is to be neither seen nor heard, is the poor referee.

Whereas most players would rather the decisions be sorted out by themselves, unfortunately the rules of the game must be applied, and it's up to this man to make sure they are done so accordingly.

Unlike the match, where there must be a winner and a loser, in the referee's case there is only a loser himself.

No matter what the result, the referee will usually come under some criticism from one or both teams, harsh in their judgement of a free-kick that wasn't given or a hand-ball that he didn't see.

There is no respite for the referee at the time, but he can take comfort in the fact that when he comes to referee again next week, he can once again, like the players start with a clean slate.

For amateur referee Joel Petrovic containing the emotions of players can often be a futile task, he explains a number of situations he has dealt with in the past.

"In the final of the under 21s Champion of Champions last year tempers got the better of a few of the players," he comments.

"It started between two players then they started coming in from everywhere. It happens a fair bit at this level, the most important thing is to just not let it get to out of control."

We've all seen on-field violence where crowds get involved and playing gear used as weapons.

Whilst this is extreme, there are plenty of cases every week, where the on field behaviour of players does threaten matches.

Petrovic admits that the role of the referee in dealing with potentially volatile situations can prove to be the difference between an all in brawl erupting or the game continuing after a resolution is made.

"Personally I prefer to try to understand the players and wh they're going through," he stat

"I'm not too harsh, and like t talk to the players a fair bit. I find that if you respect the pla then they will respect you.

"Of course there are times wh you need to be harsh and hanc out cards, but you have to try and remain consistent.

'You don't want to get into th situation where you're dishing out cards every five minutes fo late tackles."

Competitiveness is an admira trait but the recognition of a tr athlete is combining that spirit with sportsmanship and dignity

The most important thing to remember is that even though the game may not be played i front of a large audience or tel vision cameras, it's still being looked upon by easily impressionable youngsters.

Those playing not only have a responsibility to themselves an the code to act in the right ma ner but also to those younger players who keenly follow wha their fathers, brothers or neigh bours actions.

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SPECIAL: NORTHERN SPIRIT V KINGZ

NORTH SYDNEY OVAL, FRIDAY MARCH 8th

NORTHERN SPIRIT

Coach: Mick Hickman

1 Lupce Acevski
2 Jullian Watts
3 Simon Bell
4 Noel Spencer
5 Robbie Trajkovski
6 Scott Thomas
7 Andrew McDermott
8 Craig Foster
9 Adrian Cervinski
10 Pablo Cardozo
11 Troy Cranney
12 John Hutchinson
14 Michael Cartwright
15 Jeremy Seale
16 Simon Catanzaro
18 Robbie Enes
19 Ryan Griffiths

KINGZ FC

Coach: Kevin Fallon

1 Michael Theoklitos
2 Jonathon Perry
4 Levent Osman
6 George Goutziaulis
9 Paul Urlovic
11 Andrew Vlahos
12 Heremaia Ngata
13 Jeffrey Campbell
14 John Markovski
17 Robbie Hooker
22 Campbell Banks
23 Chris Wylie
24 Chris Jackson
25 Sean Douglas
26 Scott Bishop

IN THE SPIRIT

DID YOU KNOW? - Northern Spirit

1. Which Spirit player scored two goals against the Kingz earlier this year?
2. Who has been the captain for the passed two Northern Spirit games?
3. What shirt number did Robbie Slater wear in the 1998/99 season?
4. What country was Simon Bell born in?
5. What club is former Spirit striker Ben Burgess playing for this season?

DID YOU KNOW? - Kingz FC

1. Who was the Kingz inaugural coach?
2. What two former Kingz players are now playing for Northern Spirit?
3. Who was the Kingz FC coach at the start of the season?
4. Who has played the most games for the Kingz?
5. What club did goalkeeper Michael Theoklitos join the Kingz from?

DID YOU KNOW? - Australian Soccer

1. Which club does John Aloisi play for?
2. Which (and in what year) was the last club to win the Minor Premiership and NSL grand final?
3. Which three clubs have played in ever NSL season?
4. What year was the NSL grand final first played?
5. Who has played for the most NSL clubs?

Answers

Northern Spirit: 1. Ryan Griffiths. 2. Noel Spencer. 3. Eight (8). 4. Cameroon. 5. Brentford FC

Kingz FC: 1. Wynton Rufer. 2. Michael Cartwright and Marcus Stergiopoulos. 3. Mike Petersen. 4. Harry Ngatoa. 5. South Melbourne

Aussie Soccer: 1. Osasuna (Spain). 2. South Melbourne (1997/98). 3. Marconi, Adelaide City and South Melbourne. 4. 1984. 5. John Markovski (8).

SPECIAL: NORTHERN SPIRIT V KINGZ
NORTH SYDNEY OVAL, FRIDAY MARCH 8th

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Bossley Park High School looking ahead to Westfields challenge

By Adam Leto

THE Commonwealth Bank Cup has been dominated by two teams for the past five years.

Westfields Sports High and Bossley Park High have proven to be the two most successful high schools competing in the national secondary schools tournament.

The fact that both schools hail from the south-west of Sydney and are only a few kilometres apart is a reflection of how strong soccer is in the area.

But for Bossley Park their efforts have so far gone unrewarded as their neighbours from Fairfield West have beaten them in the last four finals.

Not surprising considering Westfields is a sports high school and obviously has a larger pool of talent to choose from with kids from all over the country turning up at their doorstep looking for the opportunity to pull on a Westfields jersey.

Things aren't that easy at Bossley Park with all their players coming from within the local area.

"We're only a young school, about 14 years old," Bossley Park coach David Foti told *Soccer Today*.

"All the kids we have are products of the region.

"Westfields have the pick of the players, but all our players are locals."

The Westfields-Bossley Park rivalry is the match-up that students look forward to each year.

Whilst the rivalry is certainly there, there is a respect that accompanies that fierce desire to win and it's that respect that makes these matches so special.

"We've always had a healthy rivalry with Westfields," Foti said.

"We respect them and what they've achieved and they also have a great deal of respect for us as well.

"I think that it's just great that in the south-west we have the two best (schoolboy) teams in Australia.

Last year's final saw the Bossley Park outfit finally look like ending their drought, leading Westfields going into the final minutes of play.

But with seven minutes remaining Westfields equalised and then went on to score the golden goal to seal Bossley Park's fate.

This was not the first time Westfields have come from nowhere to snatch victory, with the previous final seeing the Hamilton Rd team score against the run of play and again walk off with the trophy.

Bossley Park High's girls with last year's Telstra All Schools Cup Sixes tournament.

Westfields have become renowned for their soccer academy which has produced an abundance of talent, including the likes of Leeds United duo Harry Kewell and Jacob Burns and Australia women's international Kelly Golebiowski.

Bossley Park are moving in the same direction with their own academy that has been running for the past five years.

Two players that have gone on from the academy are Elvis Orlic and Michael Sindric of Sydney United, while several current students play reserves for United and local rivals Marconi.

Bossley Park also experienced success when their girls team won last year's Telstra All Schools Cup Sixes tournament, showing that it wasn't just the boys who were talented.

However, Bossley Park's boys side will prepare for this season with a trip to Queensland where they will play against the Queensland Institute and two other Queensland high schools.

The experience will help form the squad for this season, hoping to go one better then the past four challenges.

"This year, like in the past we're confident we can all the way," Foti says.

"Our soccer program is ongoing and getting better every year."

Such is the dominance these two schools have had in this competition it's easy to forget that there are plenty of other talented school sides across Australia. But their reputation decrees that failure to reach the 2002 final will be viewed as a disappointment by the schools themselves and their followers.

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Apia to take on crack Italian aces Roma

IN 1966 Sydney's APIA was a brilliant team considered one of the finest ever fielded in Australian soccer history. Many within the soccer fraternity would have liked to have seen APIA face Italian giants AS Roma instead of NSW. That wasn't to be and NSW lost to the tourists 2-1. But as the following SOCCER WORLD articles attest, the idea of pitting APIA against Roma was a popular one ...

WE could do much worse than fielding the entire APIA team against AS Roma instead of trying to build a NSW side of dubious strength.

APIA, now in shattering form, are undoubtedly the strongest combination in Australia.

They again proved this last week by handing out an 8-1 drubbing to Prague who, previously, had not dropped a single point.

And APIA played without three of their regulars: Van Blerk (suspended), Blue (injured) and Hughes (not yet reinstated).

There is nothing really new about building a representative team on a strong club side.

In 1947 Italy fielded a team that had 10 FC Torino players against a Hungary, which included nine Ujpest stars.

In the 1950s, Hungary relied heavily on the crack Honved team, Belgium recently did the same with Anderlecht and Portugal with Benfica.

The questions the NSW selectors have to decide is whether we should field the strongest possible team to face AS Roma or a "representative" side - in the bad sense of the word.

The NSW Federation would be justified in abandoning the meaningless tradition and field APIA, as such, against AS Roma.

That team would be stronger than any hastily assembled NSW side.

With all due respect to all non-APIA candidates, the man they could "replace" is no worse than they are.

So, in effect, these would miss out on selection because other clubs would also have to be represented.

Rorke, Van Blerke, Nuttall, Bottalico, Campana and Watkiss seem assured of a berth in the NSW team.

The Hughes-Sambrook-Bottalico half line is at least as strong, if not stronger, than any other than can be selected.

And as we have an acute shortage of classy wingers at present, Giacometti and Kerklaan wouldn't be bad choices either.

This way the team's unity wouldn't be broken and we would stand some kind of a chance against the Romans.

APIA have managed to build an incredibly strong team that should dominate the Sydney scene for some time.

In Rorke, Ackerley, Hughes, Blue and Watkiss they have Australian "caps".

Van Blerk, Nuttall, Bottalico, Campana, Giacometti and Kerklaan are also well above the Sydney average.

Then they also have young McKinnon and Muir and expect the brilliant Argentinian Arce.

In the 1958-1961 period we had the "Prague-era" - and our soccer boomed.

Now we may be in the middle of the "APIA-era" - and let's hope our ailing soccer will soon show signs of full recovery.

Pasta, vino galore for Roman visitors

The visiting AS Roma players will be feasted right throughout their tour of Australia.

During their 42 days here they will attend 19 Press or Lord Mayoral receptions and eat their way through 15 lavish dinners.

The vast Italian migrant colonies in the capital cities will give no less than nine of these dinners in honor of AS Roma.

In Sydney alone they will be guests of Marconi Club and the APIA club on successive evenings.

W.D. and H.O. Wills, sponsors of the tour and the various State Federations as well as the ASF will be hosts on most other occasions.

The visitors will take part in many sightessing trips, including one to a South Australian vineyard.

AS Roma will arrive at Sydney airport at 8.35am on Tuesday May 24 by Alitalia.

On their return journey they will travel by BOAC from Perth to Singapore and then by Alitalia to Rome.

Dahdal wants a crack at Frank's Socceroo job

By Adam Leto

OLYMPIC Sharks youth mentor Michael Dahdal wants Frank Farina's job as Australian national coach.

"I want Frank Farina's job, you can quote me on that," Dahdal told *Soccer Today.*

"I'm sick of everything that has gone on at Soccer Australia and I want to get in there to set things right.

"After Uruguay I was just feeling so low, I just thought it was time to get off my bum and try and do something about it."

Obviously, Dahdal is an ambitious man and this is not only reflected in his words, but also in his actions and the calibre of teams he has been involved with.

Last year he was in charge of the Parramatta Eagles under 17s side that was rated as one of the best teams for their age in Australia.

They travelled to Europe and competed successfully at the Gothia Cup, making the rest of the world sit up and notice that although we don't have the same reputations as our illustrious counterparts we are certainly just as good.

This year though Dahdal accepted the challenge of assistant director of youth coaching at Toyota Park.

The Sharks probably have one of the richest bases of junior talent in Australia, and Dahdal is looking forward to guiding these youngsters onto brighter things.

"So far and so good," Dahdal said.

"We're well into pre-season now and things are going really well, I'm excited.

"All the teams are progressing and we'll be looking at bringing on a lot more 15s through to the 17s this year.

"We're looking at developing more players this season and encouraging young boys at playing up an age group.

"Having said that the club is very competitive and does want win games as well as help develop players."

From 11s to 17s Dahdal will be assisting in maintaining the high level that Olympic has produced in recent years.

Dahdal is not one to skirt a task and the bigger the better, for the man that has his eyes on one day coaching Australia.

Actions speak far louder than words as far as Dahdal is concerned and at just 24 he has a mountain of experience and knowledge that he is more than happy to pass on.

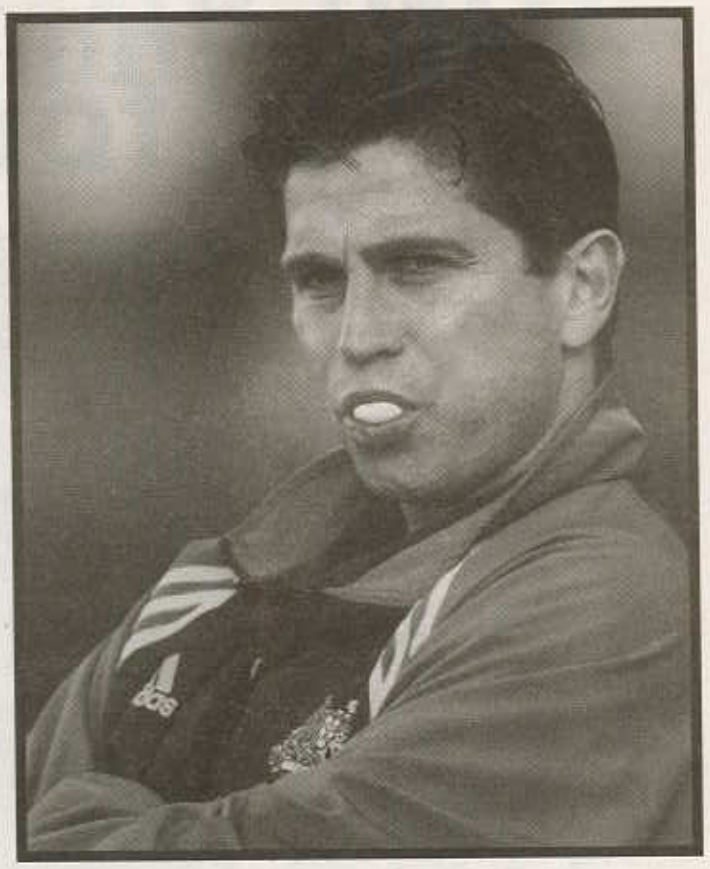
Having spent three years at the Eagles Dahdal was technical advisor and assistant to the Fiji National team during last year's Oceania qualifiers and has a host of qualifications and coaching certificates to his name.

Future plans aside, at the moment Dahdal is concentrating on his role at Olympic and improving on their performances of last season.

Last season the main problem was that the club probably had too many younger players playing at higher age groups.

They had one side finish as runners-up and this season with the help of Dahdal will be confident that their now mature-minded players will be ready to compete against what is shaping as an even stronger field.

As was mentioned Dahdal likes a challenge



and that's what he's sure to face in this season's Premier Youth League competition.

"Coming to Olympic, a big part of my decision to come here was the fact that there would be a lot more responsibility," he explains.

"It's a totally different role to that at Parramatta.

"There are different players to get used to, and the set-up is also different.

"I just felt like I needed a new challenge and that's certainly what's happening."

Power and Spirit: destiny in own hands

By Derek Royal

CROSSTOWN rivals Northern Spirit and Parramatta Power have this season jostled around the fringes of the Top Six.

And with just five rounds remaining before the end of the regular season, both sides must turn the tide and throw caution to the wind if they are to qualify for the big games at the end of the season.

Spirit this Friday host the struggling Football Kingz, while Power meet League leaders and premiership favourites Perth Glory at Parramatta Stadium.

While Spirit should dismiss the Kiwi-based unit without any trouble, Parramatta's task is a huge one.

In the past three weeks Power has lost three games, falling victim to Brisbane, South Melbourne and Marconi. But the revolving chair syndrome perpetuated by coach David Mitchell and players Ahmad Elrich and Leslie Pogliacomi hasn't helped their cause. In the wake of the 4-1 battering in Brisbane, Mitchell departed Australia for the Netherlands, where he has spent the past three weeks on business, although nobody knows whether that business has been personal or otherwise. Elrich and Pogliacomi headed to Norway and England respectively for trials and while all three are believed to be available for coaching and playing duties this weekend, the damage may already have been done. Despite their woes, Parramatta is just a point outside the Top Six and their destiny rests in their own hands. But while on the outside things may appear rosy, on the inside, the club is hurting and the players have a huge psychological mountain to climb. How the boys from Sydney's west can lift themselves psychologically will not just have a huge bearing on the Perth game's outcome, it will also have a bearing on where the team finishes the season.

Parramatta have in the past fortnight been wandering around in the land of the living dead following the departure of Mitchell and to a lesser degree, Elrich and Pogliacomi.

The break couldn't have come at a more inopportune time given the Power's precarious position on the fringes of the Top Six. Parramatta caretaker coach Stuart Munro has done all he can to lift his side, even allowing them to indulge in a bonding session designed to boost their confidence, spirit and sense of camaraderie. It appeared to be working in last week's derby against Marconi when the Power created enough opportunities to score, only to see them squandered. And at the end of the day Parramatta played the better football, only to finish on the wrong side of the ledger.

"We lacked desperation and passion to win," Munro said in a post-match interview.

"We just don't have the desperation at the moment to get the results, the final pass or the final touch correct.

"We look like we're working hard, trying hard and if we scored just after half time then I think we would have a good chance. We had one or two chances early in the first half which I thought we could have done a lot better with. Decision making is what killed us in the early part of the game and with Marconi two goals up it was just a struggle."

Despite the loss the Power remains in seventh position and who knows, a win against the odds on Saturday night may just be the tonic for a champagne finish.

Leeds United inundated with offers ... but none for Kewell

English soccer club Leeds United has not received a single offer for Australian star Harry Kewell, in another indication of the 2000 young player of the year's fading form.

Pundits have suggested Leeds fans, who angrily jeered head coach Brian Kidd during last weekend's miserable 0-0 draw with Everton, should direct their attention at the Socceroo instead.

Leeds has not registered a win in 10 games since New Year's Day and manager David O'Leary admits there will be a clean-out at the end of the season if the club, as expected, fails to qualify for the European competition.

Kewell's Australian team-mate Mark Viduka has been linked with a move to Roma, while Frenchman Olivier Dacourt and captain Rio Ferdinand are also likely transfer targets.

But interest in Kewell, who has

been nurtured by the club since the age of 16, is minimal.

"There are definitely going to be a few players going out in the summer to freshen it up," O'Leary told British newspaper The Daily Telegraph.

"As Bobby Robson said to me, 'Never be afraid to sell a player because there's always somebody to replace him.'

"People say we have spent too much money (STG65 million, ($A178 million) but we have been offered STG30 million ($A82 million) for Rio and fortunes for Dacourt, Viduka, Bakke and Danny Mills."

Not a single offer has been made for Kewell, a brilliant player when in the mood but one who has not been delivering on the pitch this year and is also perceived as arrogant.

Kewell has been in indifferent form since returning from Australia's failed campaign to qualify for the World Cup last November.

Headlines about him this year have focused on his forthcoming wedding to soap opera actress Sheree Murphy, with whom he has a baby son, and his Spanish lessons rather than his football.

O'Leary refused to comment on Kewell.

But he pointed to the example of rival left-wingers Robert Pires of Arsenal and Ryan Giggs at Manchester United.

"I said to Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger recently that Pires could be player of the year," O'Leary said.

"He works up and back, doing what Ryan Giggs has done week in, week out for many seasons.

"I would like some of our players to have that hunger and not go about thinking 'we are good players' when they haven't done anything yet."

AAP

Muscat move to Rangers imminent

Socceroo hardman Kevin Muscat has been spotted house-hunting as he gears up for an end-of-season move to Glasgow Rangers, according to a British newspaper.

The paper claims the Wolverhampton Wanderers defender, who is available on a Bosman free transfer at the end of the season, has already held talks with the Ibrox club about a move north of the border.

West Ham are also keen to land Muscat, who has reportedly agreed in principal to join Rangers on a four-year deal in July.

The imminent arrival of the Aussie raises questions over the future of the man currently occupying that position, Fernando Ricksen.

Ricksen, signed from AZ Alkmaar for $10 million in July 2000, is believed to be happy at Ibrox but his wife, who already spends much of her time out of the country, is keen on a return to Holland.

OKON WANTS TO STAY AT WATFORD

Socceroo captain Paul Okon is optimistic he can make his move to English first division side Watford permanent at the end of the season.

Okon is on loan from Premier League club Middlesbrough after falling out of favour with new manager Steve McClaren.

But he said he hoped the switch would be for good.

"I would be lying if I said I hadn't thought about wanting to stay on here," he told British newspaper The Daily Mail.

"I'm really enjoying my time at Watford.

"It never entered my head that it's first division. Although the results haven't been what anyone wants, (manager) Gianluca Vialli is taking the club in the right direction."

Okon suffered a hamstring injury in Sunday's 1-0 loss to Crewe Alexandra and will be sidelined for the next few weeks.

AAP

Madrid toasts Centenary with another trophy push

By Stephen Mackey in Madrid

REAL Madrid, world body FIFA's "soccer club of the century", celebrated its 100th birthday on Wednesday with a chance to add another piece of silverware to its already overflowing trophy case.

If the Spanish powerhouse fails to win the Copa del Rey at the Bernabeu stadium against league rival Deportivo de La Coruna, Europe's most successful club team - which boasts FIFA Player of the Year Luis Figo and French star Zinedine Zidane - can still claim its ninth European Cup or its record 29th Spanish league title.

Besides its eight European Cups, Real Madrid has won two UEFA Cups and two World Club Championships.

In Spain, it has 17 Copa del Rey trophies, one Spanish League Cup and four Spanish Super Cups to go along with 28 league titles.

Madrid began as Madrid Football Club on March 6, 1902, playing in a regional league in the Spanish capital under its first president, Catalan trader Juan Padros Rubio.

In 1920, the team acquired its regal prefix Real from King Alfonso XIII.

Real Madrid turned professional nine years later, when the national soccer league was formed.

The team landed the first of two straight league titles in 1932, but had to wait until 1954 - 11 years after club president Santiago Bernabeu arrived - for its third.

Bernabeu, a former Madrid player who fought with General Francisco Franco's Nationalist troops in the Civil War, played a pivotal role in the club's transformation to a world soccer power.

After the club's ground was damaged in fighting, Bernabeu helped build the team's current home, which was completed in 1947 and bears his name.

Bernabeu, with suggestions of intervention by Franco's regime - also beat arch rival FC Barcelona in the bitter battle to sign Argentine forward Alfredo di Stefano in 1953 from Colombian side Millonarios.

The affair set off the oft-repeated accusation, particularly in Catalonia, that Madrid received privileges during the 1939-75 dictatorship.

While Franco appeared keen to take a swipe at Barcelona, a flagship of Catalan nationalism, the allegations of governmental favouritism extend to the present day.

Inspired by di Stefano, Madrid won the first European Cup in 1956, edging French side Stade de Reims 4-3 in Paris.

The team then went on to win the next four.

Hungarian star Ferenc Puskas joined Madrid in time to net four goals in one of the best finals in European Cup history, a 7-3 trouncing of Eintracht Frankfurt at Glasgow's Hampden Park in 1960.

Di Stefano got the other three goals.

Bernabeu's death in 1978 ended his 35-year tenure, but Madrid's domestic standing remained intact with seven more league titles in a 12-year spell.

At the start of Ramon Mendoza's presidency, the club won back-to-back UEFA Cups in 1985 and 1986, its first international successes since lifting its sixth European Cup almost 20 years earlier.

A new crop of players won five successive league titles up to 1990 but those trophies were achieved against a backdrop of mounting debts.

Mendoza and his successor, former vice president Lorenzo Sanz, oversaw 13 changes of coach in the 1990s as success on the pitch was demanded to mask its worsening financial situation.

Nearly a year after his election in June 2000, Perez launched a probe into the disappearance of 350 million pesetas ($A3.51 million) during Sanz's presidency.

But Madrid again clinched Europe's top trophy in 1998 and 2000 with the help of prolific striker Raul Gonzalez.

Perez now directs his efforts toward improving the status and financial health of a club he initially described as "gravely ill".

15 year-old in line for AC Milan Presidency

The 15-year-old son of AC Milan boss Silvio Berlusconi could replace his father as president of the Italian football giants, it was reported in Italy earlier this week.

Luigino Berlusconi was among six people mooted by the Gazzetta dello Sport for the job, which will come vacant if Berlusconi senior steps down as expected.

Berlusconi is widely reported to be on the brink of relinquishing the president's post, to avoid a conflict of interests between his job as Italy's prime minister and his many business interests.

Tuesday's Gazzetta identifies five men and the boy, three of whom are members of the Berlusconi clan, as possible successors to the premier who took the reins at AC Milan in 1986 and will remain the owner even if he quits.

The paper admits Luigino is a long shot but adds: "After his dad Silvio he is the biggest Milan fan in the family. He may be 15 but who knows?"

It goes on to suggest Luigino could be given the title of president with current AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani acting as a sort of Prince Regent, gradually grooming Luigino.

Berlusconi's oldest son Piersilvio and his brother Paolo have also been tipped to fill the position while AC Milan playing legend Franco Baresi, a member of the board, is also favoured by many.

Many feel Galliani would be the sentimental choice as he has been president in all but name since Berlusconi moved into the world of politics.

The least likely of the six candidates mentioned in the paper is Italian politician Fausto Bertinotti whose name was only mentioned as a joke by Paolo Berlusconi.

Like the centre-right prime minister, Bertinotti is a fanatical AC Milan fan but is also a hardline Communist. Paolo Berlusconi believes his brother could woo more left-wing voters by giving Bertinotti the job.

AFP

NSL SCOREBOARD

WOLVES 1

D Wells 80'

OLYMPIC 2

A Packer 17' S Laybutt 33'

Referee: Mark Shield

KINGZ FC 1

H Ngata 83'

KNIGHTS 2

X Sulemani 63'/68'

Referee: Derek Rugg

NEWCASTLE 0

SOUTH 0

Referee: Simon Micallef

STRIKERS 3

K Rees og 13'P Foster 38' p M Baird 81'

ADELAIDE CITY 0

Referee: Angelo Nardi

MARCONI 3

R Brownlie 40'/55'/57'

POWER 0

Referee: Matthew Breeze

PERTH GLORY 3

SPIRIT 0

Referee: Eddie Lennie

SYDNEY UTD

BYE

Wollongong: 1 D Anastasiadis (gk) 3 A Ceccoli 4 R Stanton 5 D Cervinski 6 A Castro (-57') 10 S Young 11 N Sekulovski (-71') 13 C Anthopoulos 17 B Blake (-14') 23 D Mennillo 24 DWells Subs: 9 Z Babic (+71') 15 D Huxley (+14') 25 G Sharland (+57') 30 S Whalan(gk)
Olympic: 1 C Bolton (gk) 2 S Laybutt 8 T Pondeljak 9 D Macallister 10 T Halpin 11 J North 16 J Harris (-71') 23 A Packer 24 A Durante (-85') 27 H Ishida (-74') 28 A Juric Subs: 6 W Srhoj (+85') 12 E Augerinos (+74') 17 F Agius (+71')
Crowd: 3,556 **Venue:** WIN Stadium

Kingz: 1 M Theoklitos (gk) 2 J Perry 6 G Goutzioulis 9 P Urlovic 11 A Vlahos (-75') 12 H Ngata (-87') 14 J Markovski 17 R Hooker 22 C Banks 24 C Jackson 25 S Douglas Subs: 4 L Osman (+87') 13 J Campbell (+75') 23 C Wylie 26 S Bishop (gk)
Knights: 1 M John (gk) 2 J Rajher 3 R Vargas 4 S Ognenovski 5 S Horvat 6 A Marth 9 J Porter 10 A Da Costa 13 I Jolic (-81') 19 A Pelikan 25 I De Jesus (-59') Subs: 11 X Sulemani (+59') 16 A Kiratzoglou (+81') 17 D Rocco 30 D McGrath (gk)
Crowd: 2,342 **Venue:** Ericsson Stadium

Newcastle: 1 D Beltrame (gk) 2 M Prentice (-73') 4 C Zoricich 6 M Bingley 10 D McBreen (-69') 11 P Tsekenis 12 S Baillie 13 M Blagojevic 16 J Schirripa (-84') 17 E Masi 22 R Middleby Subs: 7 T Dodd (+84') [illegible] (+73') 25 A Moreira (+69') 20 B Swancott (gk)
South Melbour[illegible] [illegible] Petkovic (gk) 2 S Iosifidis 3 F De Amicis 4 M Durakovic 7 S Panopoulos 8 [illegible] 9 P Trimboli (-75') 12 R Sekulovski 16 M Murdocca 19 P Kisnorbo [illegible]teignis Subs: 10 P Buljan (+75') 21 V Lia 26 N Sabljak 23 E Galekovic (gk)
Crowd: 8,958 **Venue:** Energy Australia Stadium

Brisbane: 1 J Kearton (gk) 2 R Alagich 3 S Stefanutto 4 J McKain 6 P Grierson 7 F Rech 8 A Webber 9 P Foster (-78') 11 J Carbone (-84') 15 M McKay 18 L Drake (-54') Subs: 10 K Trajanovski (+54') 16 R McQuilter (+84') 17 M Baird (+78') 20 C Baldock (gk)
Adelaide City: 20 D Godley (gk) 2 M Kemp 3 I Fyfe 4 A Kovacevic 7 L Pantelis 8 C Veart 9 R Sareceno 10 A Vidmar 13 K Rees 14 A Goulding (-65') 22 M Saric Subs: 18 I Karlovic (+65') 21 Adriano Pellegrino
Crowd:2,532 **Venue:** Ballymore

Marconi: 1 M Turnbull (gk) 4 A Costanzo 5 D Longo 8 G Last (-62') 10 J Maisano (-76') 12 S Bozinovski 13 S Webb 15 R Brownlie 21 S Trajcevski 22 A Brosque (-72') 23 C Gibson Subs: 2 M Beauchamp (+76') 11 N Tome (+72') 18 S Radulovic (+62') 30 B Catlin (gk)
Parramatta: 20 L Reddy (gk) 2 D Barrett 3 M Langdon 4 N Orlic 5 A Tobin (-72') 7 W O'Sullivan 10 L Lapsansky 11 D Brown (-62') 16 B Holman (-62') 19 J Buonavoglia 21 A Elrich Subs: 9 Z Arambasic (+62') 17 S Fitzsimmons (+62') 28 P Bennett (+72') 30 A Carman (gk)
Crowd:2,756 **Venue:** Marconi Stadium

Perth: 1 J Petkovic (gk) 2 M Horsley (-77') 3 J Harnwell (-72') 5 C Deans 7 S Miller 8 B Maloney 10 B Despotovski 12 B Hassell 15 E Aldrighi Junior (-81') 16 D Mori 18 S Pryce Subs: 9 A Edwards (+81') 23 D Tarka (+72') 26 N Mrdja (+77') 30 V Matassa (gk)
Spirit: 1 L Acevski (gk) 2 J Watts (-30') 3 S Bell 4 N Spencer 5 R Trajkovski (-79') 6 S Thomas 9 A Cervinski 10 P Cardozo 12 J Hutchinson (-59') 13 M Stergiopoulos 18 R Enes Subs: 8 Craig Foster (+59') 19 R Griffiths (+79') 22 J Sobczyk (+30') 30 J Rex (gk)
Crowd: 11,229 **Venue:** Perth Oval

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE:
Standings at Round 21

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Perth Glory	19	14	4	1	42	16	46
2 Newcastle United	20	8	10	2	25	17	34
3 Olympic Sharks	19	10	3	6	28	15	33
4 Brisbane Strikers	19	9	6	4	35	25	33
5 Melbourne Knights	20	9	2	9	33	32	29
6 Northern Spirit	20	7	5	8	26	33	26
7 Parramatta Power	20	7	4	9	20	25	25
8 South Melbourne	19	6	6	7	17	19	24
9 Marconi Stallions	19	6	5	8	23	25	23
10 Wollongong Wolves	20	5	7	8	20	29	22
11 Sydney United	19	5	4	10	22	30	19
12 Adelaide City Force	19	3	7	9	22	30	16
13 Kingz FC	19	3	5	11	23	40	14

LEADING SCORERS

16	MORI Damian	Perth Glory
11	FOSTER Paul	Brisbane Strikers
10	[illegible]OWSKI Bobby	Perth Glory
10	CARDOZO Pa[illegible]	Northern Spirit
10	MILICIC Ante	[illegible]mpic Sharks
10	PORTER Joel	Knights
9	DA COSTA Antonio	Knights
9	RECH Fernando	Brisbane Strikers
8	URLOVIC Paul	Kingz FC
7	GRIFFITHS Joel	Newcastle
7	MOREIRA Alex	Newcastle
7	TUNBRIDGE Scott	Adelaide City
6	BROWNLIE Royce	Marconi
6	MAISANO John	Marconi
6	MALONEY Brad	Perth Glory
6	MENAPI Commins	Sydney United
5	BUONAVOGLIA John	Power
5	MASI Esala	Newcastle
5	PONDELJAK Tom	Olympic
5	YOUNG Stuart	Wolves
4	BAIRD Michael	Strikers
4	BOUTSIANIS Con	South
4	CARBONE John	Strikers
4	CERVINSKI Adrian	Spirit
3	ARAMBASIC Zlatko	Power
3	BACAK Joe	South
3	CARLE Nick	Olympic
3	DE JESUS Ivo	Knights
3	DEUR Ante	Sydney United
3	GOUTZIOULIS George	Kingz FC
3	GULESSARIAN Kevo	Stallions
3	HARNWELL Jamie	Perth Glory
3	HUTCHINSON John	Spirit
3	MACALLISTER Dylan	Olympic
3	MARTH Andrew	Knights
3	MCBREEN Daniel	Newcastle
3	MIDDLEBY Robbie	Newcastle
3	NGATA Heremaia	Kingz FC
3	NORTH Jade	Olympic

THE BRIAN BROWN COLUMN

THE New South Wales Premier League is reaching a vital stage in the season with a number of crunch games coming up.

So far this season we have been fortunate enough to witness quite a number of high-quality matches and plenty of goals, with the action sure to only get better as we approach the finals.

The Parramatta Eagles and the Bonnyrigg White Eagles are the top two sides in the competition and with what they have shown this season they have every right to be where they are.

They have scored the most goals in the competition and in this day and age of football, goals are what people want to see.

As a whole the NSW Premier League have scored more goals compared to what we have seen in the NSL.

The Premier League has averaged 3.14 goals per game, compared to 2.67 goals per game in the NSL.

Some critics may say that this could come down to the defences in the Premier League not being of the same standard to that in the NSL, but you cannot deny that the Premier League is certainly home to some of the best attacking players in the country.

It's also going to be an interesting battle for the remaining finals spots with teams like Belconnen, Leichhardt, my own Blacktown side, Fairfield and Bankstown all chasing after the three final places.

Whatever the scenario there is sure to be some intense games in the lead-up as teams put everything on the line in order to compete in the post-season.

SHOULD teams be promoted and relegated in this country?

This is the question that has long been a topic of much discussion and debate over the years, but we are yet to reach a concrete answer on whether this situation will ever be resolved.

Parramatta and Bonnyrigg are the two obvious examples of clubs that should be promoted whilst the two bottom teams should be relegated.

My personal opinion is that it should become part of the game in this country, and one only needs to look at all the other footballing countries across the world to see how it can be successfully achieved.

At this time of year it would in particular be of greater significance, and whilst at current the interest isn't there for teams near the bottom of the table, if faced by the threat of relegation you can be assured that there would be a lot more intensity and emotion in these games.

THE situation at Blacktown is looking a lot brighter than it did a few weeks ago.

We've had an up and down season but we are starting to play a lot better of late.

The goal we scored last week was one of the best goals I have ever seen, and involved four one touch passes followed by a 25 metre volley by Zlatko Donev.

It was up there with the goals the likes of (Arsenal star) Denis Bergkamp has been scoring such was the preciseness of this effort, it really was brilliant.

THE final comment I'd like to make is that of the criticism that coaches can come under.

Criticism is part of the game and something that like players, coaches have to be able to deal with.

But in allowing for this criticism it's important that people understand the situation completely before making assumptions on who is to blame and why.

Two recent examples spring to mind where the whole story wasn't told that led to coaches coming under fire for circumstances that they weren't totally in control of.

The first involved Fairfield Bulls coach Craig Sharpley and his decision to substitute strikers Marc Hoenselaars and Matthew Borg in a match they played against Blacktown a couple of weeks ago.

Sharpley has come under criticism for taking off two of his most influential weapons with little time remaining and his side well in command.

The fact that his side went on to lose the match compounded that decision, and led to his castration in the press.

Bonnyrigg and Parramatta are two of the Premier League's top guns

The fact that one of those players was injured and had asked to come off was not reported.

It was a fair enough decision for Craig to make, particularly when he didn't really have a choice when one of his players was injured.

The second instance, was the match we played against Parramatta Eagles a few weeks back, where the game didn't live up to the exciting attacking brand of football that we expect from these two teams.

The most pertinent factor contributing to this was the state of the ground which was a quagmire, which again wasn't reported, and certainly affected the standard of play.

I remember Jim Nikas making a run and actually sinking further and further into the ground the more he ran, the pitch was that bad.

There is nothing wrong with constructive criticism but sometimes people need to look that little bit deeper before expressing their opinions.

Brian Brown coaches the New South Wales State Team and Blacktown City Demons.

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE PREVIEW

THE BIG GAME

Bankstown City Lions versus Bonnyrigg White Eagles at Jensen Park Sunday 10 March

THE Lions thought they had done enough to secure victory against the Saints last week thanks to a goal in the 88th minute to Darren Iocca.

But they weren't banking on the resilience of a Saints side that has shown little fight all year though, so it came as a shock see the George Maglis equalise for St. George a minute later leaving both sides with a point.

With only two points in four matches the Lions sit three points out of the Top Five, and time is fast running out to turn their current slump around.

It won't be easy against a Bonnyrigg side that showed scant regard for their opposition in their last outing with a 6-0 drubbing of Penrith.

The Bonnyrigg side looks as though they have regained their confidence from the start of the year, and despite a small hiccup in the middle of the season, are starting to ignite once again.

There were certainly plenty of fireworks last time these two sides clashed with Lions defenders Paul Wearne and Brian Raeburn both given their marching orders.

Reaburn was sent off in the 13th minute, and having spent most of the game playing with only ten men, it was always going to be an uphill battle for Bankstown.

More so considering the red-hot form of striker Jimmy Aschner who scored all four goals. With Aschner re-capturing his form in front of goals for the White Eagles, he no doubt will be licking his lips in anticipation of this one.

The Lions though have undergone radical changes and will throw plenty at the White Eagles defence.

Guys like Umlil, Luff, Carle and Iocca have all added to the strike-power of the Lions. Defensively however, the Lions have shown to be susceptible and have conceded 11 goals in their last four matches.

The White Eagles have been without Tayfun Devrimol the last few weeks with an ankle injury and Vuko Tomasevic has also been on the sidelines.

Devrimol in particular has had a luckless season and after missing several months with a knee injury played only a handful of games before becoming unstuck again.

The boys from Bonnyrigg are currently toughing it out with the Parramatta Eagles in an unrelenting dual for the top spot.

Knowing that the dropping of any points could result in the loss of the minor premiership, the White Eagles are aware that their destiny is in their own hands.

They have a fairly easy run home with the only real tests looking to be against an in form Blacktown side and the Fairfield Bulls looking to sneak into the Top Five.

Still at this time of the year, and with team's seasons on the line, anything is possible and no wins are guaranteed.

A big crowd is sure to get down to Jensen Park to help get the Lions over the line, and hopefully help keep their finals chances alive.

Bonnyrigg star Tayfun Devrimol on the ball ...

Squads

Bankstown City Lions: 1. Zlatko Josevski, 2. Sefer Yildiz, 3. Richard Luksic, 4. Bryan Raeburn, 5. Anthony Kanaan, 6. Paul Wearne, 7. George Issa, 8. Robert Issa, 9. Goce Trposki, 10. Iain MacDonald, 11. Alex Trpkoski, 12. Adam Mammoliti, 13. Saso Boskovski, 14. Freddy Umlil, 15. Damien Luksic, 16. Colin Luff, 17. Steven Dimitrievski, 18. Dong-Ki Kim, 19. Robert Angievski, 20. Cem Akilli, 21. Darren Iocca, 22. Leo Carle,

Coach: Ljube Jancev

Players to watch: Luff, Angievski

Bonnyrigg White Eagles: 1. Fernando Greco, 2. Sasha Utjesenovic, 4. Bobby Dragas, 5. Tayfun Devrimol, 6. Vuko Tomasevic, 7. Javier Mancino, 8. David Harding, 9. Shane Knight, 10. Christopher Bradley, 11. Johnny Ghisso, 13. Robert Gomez, 14. Leigh Gunn, 15. Peter Cklamovski, 16. Michael Hawrysiuk, 17. Jimmy Aschner, 18. John Kyriazopoulos, 20. David Aceski, 22. Rajko Mandic, 23.Devrim Huseyin

Coach: Greg Woodhouse

Players to watch: Huseyin, Ghisso

X-Factor: Look for a pumped up Colin Luff to knock one in against his former club. Gomez and Aschner will also know the Lions fairly well having spent time with the club in last year's Winter competition.

Prediction: White-Eagles get up in a close one

Ferguson not ready to ride into the sunset

SIR Alex Ferguson is too young, too fit and too eager to be put out to pasture.

That's how the 60-year-old Scotsman last week summed up his "u-turn" decision against retiring, opting instead for a three year contract to stay as Manchester United soccer manager.

"I couldn't see myself riding into the sunset, not just yet," Ferguson said, seated alongside the English Premier League champion club's chief executive Peter Kenyon.

Ferguson will reportedly earn STG70,000 ($A191,000) weekly under the new contract, making him the highest paid boss in the domestic game.

Ferguson - who had planned to step down at the end of this season - credited his wife, Cathy, for his change of heart.

"As Cathy says 'retire when you're tired' and I feel strong, young and fit," he said.

"Hopefully my health will be maintained and I can go on and do the next few years because I do think we can get better."

The club announced three weeks ago that Ferguson had changed his mind and wanted to stay at Old Trafford.

The new deal was formally signed yesterday.

"Perhaps the only people that aren't happy today are our competition," said Kenyon, who was unsuccessful in a long search for a replacement for Ferguson.

The Scotsman joined Manchester United in 1986 from Aberdeen and has won seven league titles and the coveted European Champions Cup in 1999.

At Aberdeen he also won two league titles and the European Cup Winners Cup.

United is currently in first place in the Premier League and on course for a record fourth straight title.

"I said I was confident we would have a manager in place by the end of the season and that we'd have the best manager possible," Kenyon said.

"I'm delighted that we've achieved both those things. We've got a manager whose record is second to none and we've got continuity."

Ferguson snapped at one reporter who asked about his salary, which is reported to be STG11 million ($A30.02 million) over three years - twice his present wage.

The new deal begins on July 1.

"That's none of your business," said Ferguson, who will earn as much as the club's top paid player - midfielder Roy Keane.

Keane and fellow midfielder David Beckham are yet to sign new contracts, probably the first job Ferguson needs to tackle.

"David ... wants to stay," Ferguson said.

"Roy Keane too, any player we are trying to sign - David's no different.

"Hopefully in the next two weeks we might get that sorted. David knows that.

"I have spoken to him once or twice and explained to him."

Ferguson said his decision to bench Beckham earlier this season had paid off.

"When he was left out of the team, it was an area of worry for him," he said.

"It was for the best reasons, and has come to fruition now.

"His form now is because we rested him. We wouldn't have seen that form today."

Ferguson described United as "a very difficult club to leave, as I have found out in the last few months".

With United currently in a race with Newcastle, Arsenal and Liverpool for this season's league title, Ferguson said he'd be content with one trophy per season, listing the Champions Cup, league title and FA Cup as the prime goals.

AP

Keane signs on the dotted line for another four years at Man United

MANCHESTER United captain Roy Keane has agreed a new four-year contract with the English champions. Keane, 30, has signed a deal until June 2006 just days after United manager Sir Alex Ferguson committed himself to Old Trafford for a further three years.

"I'm delighted to be staying at United and I'm looking forward to enjoying even more success with the team over the next few years," Keane said in a statement on the club's official web site.

Ferguson was understandably delighted that his inspirational skipper is staying.

"This is great news," Ferguson said. "Roy is an unbelievable player whose leadership, passion and drive epitomise the best qualities of Manchester United.

"I am really pleased to have Roy on board for another four years."

United chief executive Peter Kenyon also expressed his satisfaction at completing the deal.

"We are absolutely delighted to be signing Roy to a new contract," he said. "We never doubted that he wanted to stay at United.

"The continuity and stability which is so important to United's success is guaranteed."

Keane joined United from Nottingham Forest in 1993 for a then British record transfer fee of 3.75 million pounds ($5.33 million). He has made 349 appearances for the Old Trafford club, and has been capped 57 times by his country, who he will lead to the World Cup finals in south Korea and Japan. Keane has won six premier league titles with United and three FA Cups, and he played a major part in the club's 1999 Champions League triumph, though he missed the final against Bayern Munich through suspension.

Reuters

Campaigner denies bribes were paid for Blatter election

THE man accused of paying bribes to ensure the election of Sepp Blatter as FIFA president said the allegations were lies.

Mohamed Bin Hammam, a member of FIFA's executive committee, said he had spent about $US50,000 ($A96,400) - but only on expenses - as he lobbied for the Swiss to be elected the world soccer body's chief in 1998.

In an interview in the daily *Blick,* the Qatari denied claims that he had taken a leading role in arranging for $US100,000 ($A192,800) bribes to be paid to African FIFA members to persuade them to vote for Blatter instead of Sweden's Lennart Johansson.

Farah Addo, a vice president of the African soccer confederation CAF, alleged last week that Blatter's Arab backers tried to buy his vote before the election in Paris in June 1998.

Addo said he rejected the money, but added that he witnessed cash being exchanged for votes in Paris.

Hammam said Addo was "a dangerous person ... full of hate."

He said Addo's aim is to get Muslims into positions of power in world soccer and wants to see Cameroon's Issa Hayatou defeat Blatter in the next presidential election in May.

Hammam also rejected as "a lie" a claim by Somali association vice-president Mohiadin Hassan Ali that his federation accepted money to vote for Blatter.

In any case, he said, the vote was finally cast by Addo - also a Somali - for Johansson.

Blatter and Johansson - the head of the powerful European federation UEFA - traded barbs in the Swiss press over the weekend.

Speaking to the Zurich daily *Tages-Anzeiger,* Blatter said he was not prepared to get into a boxing ring with his opponents, whom he defined as "the bad losers of the summer 1998 election."

Asked if he meant Johansson, Blatter replied, "I am thinking of the people around him.

"Johansson is the president of UEFA and he could stop the attacks against me."

Johansson, in the weekly *SonntagsZeitung,* said he could not understand why Blatter was blaming him since he himself had been the victim of blatant electioneering before the vote.

A day before the election, the English Football Association changed its mind and decided to support Blatter, and then sent a fax announcing the decision to all the English-speaking associations, he said.

Shortly afterward, France and the United States followed suit.

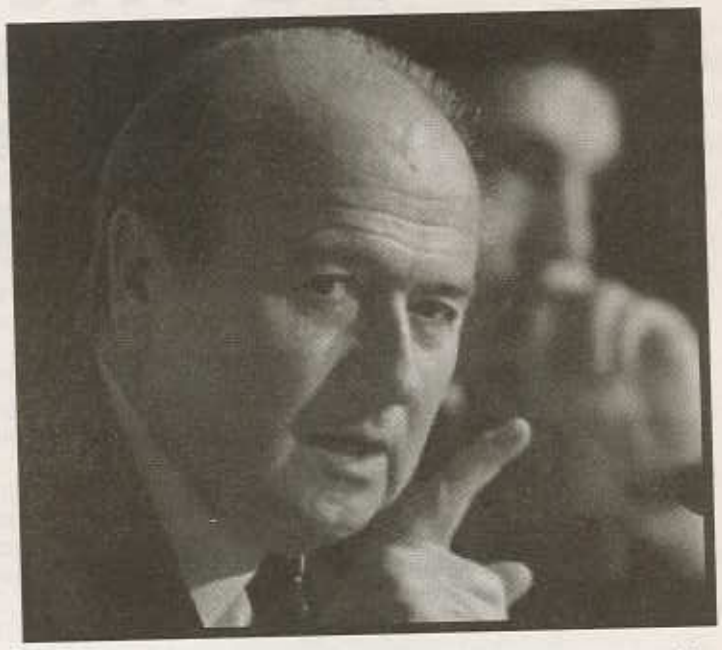
"I was sad about that and decided this was a game that I was not used to and was not ready to learn," Johansson said.

"Against this background, I cannot understand why Blatter blames me for not having stopped the people from Africa who've made new allegations."

Johansson and UEFA have called for an investigation into the allegations and into the financial state of FIFA, which was badly affected by the collapse of its marketing partner ISL/ISMM.

A special session of the executive committee will meet Thursday to decide on that, and may also consider whether to investigate the bribery claims.

Johansson said that, as a first step toward reducing



suspicion, Blatter should tell the FIFA executive committee how much he earns.

At the moment, the salary is decided between Blatter and the FIFA finance committee.

Asked how much he earns himself, Johansson told the SonntagsZeitung that he gets around 240,000 Swiss francs ($A270,000) a year for his position as UEFA president.

So far Blatter is the only declared candidate for this year's election, but others - including Hayatou and South Korea's Chung Mong-joon - have expressed an interest.

Johansson said he would not be a candidate but that if someone else stands he will have to consider how to vote.

AFP

Germans sack Egyptian hero over sex claims

HANY Ramzy, former Egyptian national football team captain and one of the most prominent foreign players in Germany, was abruptly fired by his club Kaiserslautern after being convicted of sexual molestation it was confirmed last week.

Team mates at Kaiserslautern said the news was "a bombshell" as the club management issued a statement following an emergency session late Thursday when Ramzy's conviction became known.

The 32-year-old defender - who has been capped more than 120 times and has played in Germany's Bundesliga since 1994 - was convicted in mid-February and given an eight-month suspended sentence.

The club learned of the conviction only later and suspended him forthwith.

Kaiserslautern public prosecutor Helmut Bleh Friday confirmed the conviction, saying the press had not been immediately informed in order to protect the woman involved, who had been subjected to physical force by Ramzy at a Kaiserslautern inn last August.

Ramzy had admitted the charge - meaning the woman was spared giving evidence, while Ramzy's sentence was all the lighter.

A club statement said that as soon as the case became known, Ramzy had been summoned and told he would never again play for Kaiserslautern.

He joined in 1998, following then coach Otto Rehhagel from Werder Bremen, with whom he had played since his 1994 transfer from the Swiss club Xamax Neuchatel.

Ramzy, who in Egypt in January married his long-time Italian girlfriend Emanuela - with whom he has a six-month old son - has played a total of 203 Bundesliga matches, 105 of them for Kaiserslautern.

He last appeared for Egypt at the African Cup of Nations tournament in Mali, after which he ended his international career.

DPA

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THE FINAL WHISTLE!

Inconsistent Sydney clubs have the opportunity to sneak into Finals

There's a saying that goes something like this: "a week is a long time in football".

And it most certainly is.

Last week Northern Spirit confidently set aside the Marconi challenge at North Sydney Oval and journeyed across the continent to West Australia for their vital clash against League leaders and premiership favourites Perth Glory.

Spirit departed Sydney with confidence and half-expected to give the Glory boys a run for their money.

But it just didn't happen and the home side ran roughshod over the visitors to the tune of 3-0.

Marconi however, came back from their poor performance at North Sydney and scored an upset victory over neighbours Parramatta Power in a western Sydney derby that had everything but a decent crowd.

Despite the abovementioned results, all three Sydney clubs have the opportunity to reach the Finals.

Spirit lies in sixth spot, just one point ahead of Parramatta, who in turn, are just two points ahead of Marconi.

The fact that all three have a mathematical chance of playing at the business end of the season is remarkable given the fact that all three teams have lost more games than they have won.

Spirit has won seven and lost eight; Power's record stands at seven and nine; Marconi six and eight.

All three have been guilty of playing some abysmal football, yet on their day they do have the ability to surprise.

Glory will probably end Parramatta's run in Sydney this weekend and while Olympic Sharks, Brisbane and Melbourne Knights look likely to claim spots in the Finals, there's still room for a dark horse or a "bolter" to come in from nowhere.

South Melbourne, currently riding between Parra and Marconi, has the form and the personnel to be the surprise packet in the competition and no-one, not even favourites Perth, would relish tackling them in a sudden death situation.

Your in soccer,
Derek Royal (Publisher)

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE ROUND 22

FRIDAY 8 MARCH
Northern Spirit v Football Kingz, North Sydney Oval
Adelaide City Force v South Melbourne, Hindmarsh Stadium
Newcastle United v Marconi, EnergyAustralia Stadium

SATURDAY 9 MARCH
Parramatta Power v Perth Glory, Parramatta Stadium

SUNDAY 10 MARCH
Olympic Sharks v Brisbane, Toyota Park
Melbourne Knights v Sydney United, Knights Stadium

***SOCCER TODAY* - available at newsagencies every Thursday**

THE WOMEN'S GAME

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Vivacious and friendly, Tianne started performing for the Cronulla Sharks cherleaders - the Mermaids - four years ago and while she's pretty experienced and has been there, done that, she still gets a huge adrenaline rush at showtime. Soccer Today caught up with her ...

Words: Derek Royal
Pictures: Tina Asprea

TIANNE would love to visit Italy. She already has, as a six-year-old, but now she wants to return to her father's homeland to earn a crust and to get some real Overseas Experience.

Through her father's Sicilian heritage, Tianne learnt about soccer from a young age.

So imagine the shock when she returned home one day and announced that she was going to be a cheerleader for the Cronulla Sharks rugby league team?

That was four years ago, when the vivacious 16-year-old first auditioned for the Mermaids squad.

And in the interim her family has developed a keen passion for the biff and barge game known by most Sydneysiders as "footy".

"I come from a family that loves soccer - my dad's Italian," Tianne told Soccer Today.

"I'd never gone to the footy when I was younger but since I've been involved with the Mermaids, all of a sudden it's such a big thing

that my family has come to virtually every single game, which is amazing.

"Having an Italian father watching the Sharks or watching the footy Grand Final on television and getting excited about it is just so funny because it's not something I grew up with.

"But everyone's really into it now and it's a whole lot of fun."

Tianne started dancing as a three-year-old and by the age of 12 she was an assistant dance teacher, a role she fulfilled until she won a place in the Mermaids.

But the first audition was a nerve-racking experience, especially for one so young.

"When I auditioned, there were about 60 girls trying out for six spots," Tianne said.

"I was only 16 and it was really scary and overwhelming.

"But I knew some of the girls from school and thought why not, just give it a go.

"All the girls were a lot older than me and my mum told me not to get my hopes up.

"She kept saying 'you're only young, you've got plenty of time' but I ended up making it and four years later, I'm still here."

Tianne loves the atmosphere that embraces the big games and her favourite cheerleading memory is standing in the middle of Stadium Australia for the national anthem before a 1999 State of Origin league clash between New South Wales and Queensland.

"It was the first big match at the Olympic Stadium with nearly 100, 000 singing the national anthem and it was like a dream - one of the best feelings ever. Stuff like that is what makes it so much fun and enjoyable"

But while Tianne is now into her fourth year with the squad, she still gets the same adrenaline rush now as she did when she first started.

"That's why I'm still doing it," she said. "All the girls get along so well and we have so much fun together. And little things like putting a smile on the kids' faces is what makes it all worthwhile."

So what gives Tianne the most satisfaction?

"So much work goes into our performance that if we didn't love it as much as we do we simply wouldn't do it. I've met so many girls through the squad that they're now my best friends and we have such a great time together. But having said that, we know when to be serious and we know when to switch on."

Tianne says that her goal is to: "find something that I love doing" but she is also aware that she's only young and has time to make a firm decision about where she wants to be. Italy maybe.

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DOUBLE HEADER

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